

COBALT-SERIES

谷 瑞恵

伯爵と妖精

紳士の射止めかた教えます

集英社



伯爵と妖精

登場人物紹介

リディア

妖精の姿が見え、話もできる少女。エドガーに妖精博士として雇われている。エドガーの口説き言葉に戸惑いつつも、心が動いている？

カールトン教授

リディアの父親。リディアの母とは駆け落ちをして結婚したのだが、リディアにもくわじい話を教えてくれない。

ニコ

猫の姿をした妖精。リディアの幼なじみで相棒。ふてふてしい性格だが、身なりや食事にうるさく、紳士を気取っている。

レイヴン

エドガーの従者で、神秘的な雰囲気の少年。武術は相当な腕を持ち、主人には完璧に忠実。

エドガー

妖精国伯爵。リディアの雇い主兼婚約者。形だけの婚約のはずなのに、なにかとあまい言葉で口説き、リディアを戸惑わせる。

Short Story - Until the Stork is Pleased

[This is your child. Please take loving care of our baby.]

That was the start of a troublesome day.

A basket carrying an infant was placed on the footsteps in front of the entrance to the Ashenbert Earl Manor in one of the most leading and prominent residential areas of Mayfair, London.

The letter that was tucked along with the child read that message written with poor handwriting and there was a stork's feather, said to bring good fortune that was tucked inside the envelope.

However, the Earl himself, who was gathering all of the suspicious glares of the servants, had idea that he was trying to think of a way to lie about this to his 'fiancée,' and Lydia, who arrived to work at the earl manor like always went straight to her work office as always.

She was the private fairy doctor of this earl house.

She was a fairy specialist that was employed by Edgar Ashenbert who had the title of the Earl of Ibrazel, the Fairyland.

In the England estates that were bestowed to the earl family who had ties with fairies from the old times there were many fairy dwellers and so it was easy for friction or misunderstandings to occur between humans and fairies. In those circumstances, it was the job of a fairy doctor to come stand in-between those two parties and solve the problem.

Although she was still an inexperienced newbie, this girl had pride in her job as a fairy doctor, and of course she was commuting to this earl manor for the sake of that job, not so she could be the accompany for Edgar's amusements, and of course she wasn't his 'fiancée.'

And yet that young earl declares that he will marry Lydia.

She had refused his proposal, but he said that he wouldn't give up, and so whenever they see each other's faces, he would try to court her, which was

quite troublesome.

This morning, she once more made her way through the house cautiously so that she wouldn't bump into Edgar in the hallway.

However, it was just when she had passed by the front of the drawing room. She caught a glimpse of Raven, and so she stopped.

This amber skin-toned young man was Edgar's valet. He remained sitting in a chair placed in the sun-lit terrace under the light and was looking down, without moving an inch, into the basket that was resting on his lap. It was like he was under the idea that he wasn't allowed to move not one inch.

He was had no expression on his face, and was a young man that didn't show his emotions, but since it faintly looked like he was lost and didn't know what to do, Lydia peered from the doorway to see what he was doing.

If it was Edgar's orders, it was normal for Raven to silently obey anything and everything. She wondered if he was being made to do something unreasonable.

"Good morning, Raven."

When Lydia spoke out to him, he snapped his head up. She must have startled him.

"Excuse me, but what is it that you're holding so carefully?"

She walked over to him just the basket nearly fell down from his lap and he scrambled to hold it back up.

"You mustn't, please do not come any closer."

"Huh? Why is that?"

"I was told by Mr. Tomkins that I must not let you see this."

"What is it, something dangerous?"

"No, nothing like that....."

When one is told that they couldn't see something, it was natural to want to see all the more. If it was the instructions of the butler, then it wasn't something as absolute to Raven like an order given by Edgar.

During the faint instant when Raven let his eyes fall down into the contents of the basket, Lydia swiftly stepped next to him.

When she peered down into it, she saw that there was a small infant sleeping inside peacefully.

The baby's small face was covered by hair so white that it practically didn't have any color. The baby's face was soft and plump and very adorable.

"Oh my, why it's a baby. How cute."

In the end, Raven didn't try to hide the baby from Lydia's eyes. It could have been because he didn't want to move unnecessarily and wake the baby up.

That's why Lydia moved closer to him and allowing her cheeks to soften up and take all her delight in gazing at the baby.

The question of why she wasn't allowed to look was completely out of her mind.

The baby's eyelashes twitched and the child opened its eyes just a little. The baby looked up at Lydia and closed its eyes again, as if it felt relaxed. It even appeared like the baby was smiling.

"But, whose baby is this?"

Raven, who probably wasn't good at lying, thought about it for a bit, but then honestly gave a reply.

"Apparently this baby was left in front of the entrance."

"What, an abandoned child?"

"No, umm.....I don't know."

He sure seemed to sound like he was slurring his words.

But then Lydia noticed a piece of paper inside the edge of the basket and without thinking, picked it up with her hand.

In it, it read:

[This is your child. Please take loving care of our baby.]

Oh, heavens no.....could this be..

There was no signature in the letter and she had no idea who "your" meant. However, besides Edgar, there were only servants who lived in this house.

Even if she were to include all the male servants, and even if she were to include both the next-door houses on either side, he was the only one that had the most possibility.

"Is this an illegitimate child? Of Edgar's?"

Without mistake, he loved women and was an absolute flirt.

He was a fair speaker and was good at grabbing the hearts of women, and so

there was no way that that handsome young nobleman wasn't popular with women, and even Lydia, who was quite ignorant of rumors or about the talk of the neighborhood, knew that he was having scandalous relationships with more than several women.

But to go and make an illegitimate child.

"Unbelievable, how irresponsible of him!"

When Lydia didn't think to hold back and cried that out loud, Raven murmured "I'm sorry."

"Why are you the one who is apologizing?"

"Because it seems that Miss Carlton was angered from my doings."

"I am in no way angry. I'm just saying that it's irresponsible!"

"I'm sorry."

"Not you, Edgar! Am I wrong, he went all the way and brought a child into this world, and yet I can't believe that he would end his relationship with her and go and flirt or court another woman. He should take responsibility and marry her. Or else it isn't fair to the poor child!"

"Then Lydia, we need to hurry and get married."

"Huh?"

Lydia turned to face the terrace with the same emphasizing power that was boiling in her to where the sudden interrupting voice came from, and when she saw the irresponsible man who she was talking about, more hot blood boiled up in her head.

"Edgar! Do you have any idea how grave the situation is?"

She couldn't help it, because he was making his usual fearless smile and letting his blond hair bask that was so bright and glowing that it seemed sarcastic, out to the rays of the sun as he stood with one of his arms propped up against the glass door of the terrace.

Even his moss-green necktie and charcoal-grey morning coat looked elegant along with him, making him give a perfect appearance from the start of the day.

"I understand. That's why we should hurry and get married."

He briskly walked over towards her and took Lydia's hand to give it a kiss.

She was never able to become completely used to this style of greeting. That

was because for a greeting, he would look at her with hot eyes.

However, right now the illegitimate child was more important than that. Even if he was trying to confuse her and let this matter be forgotten, Lydia wasn't going to be deceived and opened her mouth to retaliate.

"You have the wrong person. The one you need to propose marriage to is the mother of this child."

"That's what I've been doing."

"Wh-what on earth are you saying?"

Edgar picked up the stork feather that was stuck in the collar and took in both of Lydia's hands inside both of his like a cradle to make her hold onto the feather.

"Lydia, this is our baby. The hasty stork that couldn't wait looks like it has sped up the time when the baby should have been delivered, but there should be no problem since we are eventually going to get married."

".....Stork?"

"Yes, there was this stork feather inside the basket. Even the storks are showing proof that they agreed that it is our unwavering destiny that we are going to become husband and wife."

He was right, it did look like this feather came from a stork. However!

"Let's raise our baby together."

She was dumbstruck, but when she looked up to see Edgar's face, he looked back at her with a soft smile and only appeared like he was filled with joy.

Lydia started to feel faint from their gently holding hands and not being able to escape from the impression of his unusually warm ash mauve eyes.

Oh, so that's what happened. A stork had come to deliver our future baby.

.....wasn't what she was thinking.

"D-don't make a fool out of me! There isn't any way a stork would deliver a child!"

"Oh, is that so? I had no idea."

And there he went saying it like he really had no idea. There should be a limit to shameless behavior.

"Then, where is it that babies come from."

“Huh, th-that would be...”

Even if she knew that he was having fun with her, she couldn’t stop from having her face turn red.

“Oh, Lydia, please tell me.”

He is making a complete fool out of her.

He wasn’t letting go of her hands that was still being held together with his, and even if she turned her flustered face away, he leaned down to peer into her eyes.

“Excuse me,would you mind letting go.”

“Why?”

What why?

“If we looked into each other too long, do you think that a stork would bring us another baby?”

Oh, there is no helping this man.

“If it was a child with you, then I’d be happy no matter how many we have.”

“Edgar, even if that baby was your child, it has nothing to do with me! Let’s raise our baby together?! You must be out of your mind. To think that you were such an irresponsible person, I..., well I knew that, no, no, anyways I am disappointed in you! And besides, I will never get married with you!”

It was just the instant when she managed to shake off his grip.

“Am I a trouble to you? Momma.”

Momma?

Lydia turned around and slowly looked around the room to search who the voice belonged to, but then eventually her eyes fell to the basket that Raven was carrying.

From there, the baby was popping its head out and looking at her. The baby was still young that it couldn’t possibly be able to talk on its own. She kept thinking it was impossible and tried to take her eyes off, but then the baby spoke again.

“Please don’t say you won’t get married. Please, Momma.”

There was no mistake; the baby was talking to Lydia.

On top of that, the baby propped himself up over the basket and jumped down

onto the floor from Raven's lap.

The baby clothes he was wearing was white and lined with frills and hemmed with a black ribbon. The baby boy corrected the hem that had turned up softly as he stood up strongly with his own legs.

"W-what are you.."

"I'm Momma's son."

Lydia felt a faint coming on and swooned but Edgar caught her and she didn't have the strength to push him away.

"Ohh, don't get so surprised. I just haven't been born into this world yet and am living as a stork sprite for the moment being. That's why it can't be helped that Momma doesn't know anything about me yet."

"A stork.....?"

After a good look, she could see that there were small wings on the back of the baby. She thought it was some kind of decoration of his clothes, but they fidgeted and moved.

They resembled the same kind of wings that of a young chickling and was covered with white plumes, but at their tips stuck out the black flight feathers exactly like a storks.

"Uh-huh. Before a human baby is born into this world they all are stork spirits. I was told that it was to fly the sky with storks and learn about what happens in the human world."

"I-is that true?"

"Everyone says so."

However, Lydia wasn't able to believe that so easily.

There was more to learn about the depths of the fairy world, and there was no surprise is there was something that the inexperienced Lydia didn't know about, but she couldn't think that the number of stork spirits were as many as the number of human babies.

"Then you aren't my illegitimate child," murmured Edgar, like a relief.

So you did have an idea that it could possibly be yours.

Lydia's strength disappeared even more.

"But if he is Lydia's future child, then that means he would also be my child as

well."

He had quite the nerve to say such a thing as a man who could have made an illegitimate child. What was even more pushy than that was he still held Lydia in his arms and wouldn't let go.

The baby looked up towards Edgar who was like that and slightly tilted his head.

"I don't know about that. I actually don't know who it is Momma is going to marry."

"Huh, which means, your mother is always decided, but your father is not decided yet?"

"That's right. That's why if Momma were to lose her feelings of being in love, then I won't be able to be born into this world."

Suddenly the little child's face turned into a desperate look and he put both his little hands together like he was praying.

"My friends told me. My Momma distrusts men terribly and at this rate she wouldn't be able to get married. That's why I thought I must convince my Momma..."

"Distrust in men, I-I just don't have any interest in marrying an irresponsible man like him."

"Then if it was a different person, you would marry?"

All of a sudden, Edgar let go of Lydia and swiftly lifted up the baby and carried him off to the corner of the room.

"Now little boy, Lydia is my fiancée. If other men were to try and win her affections, then I'll make sure they are driven away. In other words, this is what I mean. If she doesn't come to love me, then you won't be able to be born."

Setting the baby to stand on a decoration stand, he leaned his face up to the baby's and stress, no nearly threaten him.

"Excuse me, Edgar, don't go and say what you like."

"Therefore. Don't you think its best that we join forces and help each other? You want Lydia to get married. I want to marry Lydia. Why we have the same interests,"

 said Edgar, without paying any heed to Lydia.

".....Uh-huh, you're right."

Please don't get convinced.

"First of all, I don't think that there would be a more worthy father than me. You would become the heir of the Ashenbert earl family and be able to live life in comfort. If Lydia were to leave my side and get caught by some good-for-nothing man, then you and your mother will both become miserable."

Oh, yes you're the one to say that, thought Lydia. He himself represented how good-for-nothing a man can be.

However, the small little boy shake his hair that looked like the puff of a dandelion and solemnly nodded his head.

"I don't want that."

"Then it's decided. You will acknowledge me as your father and show the ideal father and son relationship to Lydia. Then even Lydia would come to realize that I am the man that she should marry for the sake of her future child."

"All right, Poppa."

Whaat, hold on a second.

"It's Father. Like a noble."

"Uh-hum, Popp....I mean, Father."

"Uh, more than that, am I really the mother? How can you tell that its me."

To Lydia, that was the first thing she couldn't believe.

"I can tell. I had the feeling the first time I saw you."

That's much too arbitrary.

"I had heard that she was in this house, so there's no mistake, Momma."

"You must call Lydia Mother," said Edgar.

"Yes, Mother."

"Good boy. For the time being, we call you by the name Til. Viscount Tildurston, it is one of the titles that I have, and the courtesy title that is given to the eldest son of our earl family."

"Wow, that's such a wonderful name!"

It seems like the child was getting completely led on.

Edgar gently stroked the baby's head and then turned to face Lydia.

"Now then, without more ado, why don't we go out on a picnic as a family from now? So that we can get the feeling of a loving, happy family."

"I'm not going, I'm busy," replied Lydia.

"Mother is quite hard to please. Til, why don't you try and ask her yourself as well."

Edgar picked up Til once more and pushed him towards Lydia.

She was only left with the option of holding him so he wouldn't be dropped.



He still wasn't a human, so his heaviness and the touch of his softness and warmth was an illusion. Even if she thought that, he seemed like a read baby. The fairy baby smiled at her with a little embarrassment and grabbed ahold of Lydia tightly.

"Mother has such a nice smell. It's just like I had dreamed."

When he told her something like that, then she wasn't able to bring herself to say he had the wrong person.

"Let's go, Mother."

"But, you see....."

"So then, you really don't want me?"

His big blue eyes became wet and shining with tears, which made Lydia panic.

"No, fine, I'll go. Let's go on a picnic!"

"Raven, make the preparations," said Edgar without giving a pause.

Still holding the basket, Raven had been silently watching how everything was going, but at that, he bolted up to stand.

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It wasn't like she hated Edgar. Even Lydia acknowledged, for the time being, that he had good traits to him beside his looks.

To Lydia who had only been close to fairies and been seen with looks of strange and odd by the people around her, it was genuinely happy to her to be acknowledged of her power as a fairy doctor.

He was someone who proposed to her for the first time in her life, and when she thought this was going to be the first and last opportunity for such a thing, then it wasn't like she didn't feel any beating of her heart.

However, no matter what, she wasn't able to believe that he had serious feelings for her.

To Edgar who had been juggling and switching many women up till now, love must be something that quickly cools down. She guessed that it wasn't feelings of love but more that he was using the option that would tie down the fairy doctor who was an important figure to the earl family to this house forever.

Even if he did gain the title of Earl of Ibrazel, Edgar doesn't have the power to come in contact with fairies. Since he is relying on Lydia in regards to everything when it comes to fairies, it could be that he felt just an employer-worker relationship wasn't strong enough.

That's why in order to get married with Lydia, even if Edgar were to declare that he 'cut his ties with his female "friends",' she couldn't possibly believe him.

Because, just a few days earlier, Lydia heard him having a serious conversation with a certain woman.

"So, I was just being fooled around with."

It was just when she was passing by the doorway of Edgar's office. Lydia heard those words spoken that she couldn't possibly ignore, and so she couldn't help but to stop.

It was the voice of a young girl.

"No, that's not true. Only that, a flower of love can't keep blooming on forever. If you were able to spend your time beautifully, then it would be the best for both to search and find a new love before that love loses its color."

There was no mistake that the voice who she was talking to in that conversation, that sounded like he was soothing and coaxing with his talk, was Edgar.

"It was because I was from the lower birth, wasn't it? I shouldn't have believed the words that class didn't have anything to do with it..."

"Class has nothing to do with it when falling in love. But, because thinking of your sake, it means that ending the relationship is the only option. Making you into a mistress wasn't the wish is the reason. Could you understand that?"

A m-mistress?

She felt shocked at hearing such a frank word used, but Lydia thought it wasn't right to be listening to such a thing like this, and so she rush to get away from that spot. However, just when she heard the sound of a door slamming open with a loud force, a girl in a maid uniform went running out with her hands covering her face.

The girl realized Lydia was there and rushed to face away, and since it was the first time to see her face for Lydia, she guessed that the girl must be a newly employed housemaid.

Lydia was dumbfounded at how he could fool around even with a servant, but as time went by, gradually she felt anger build up inside her.

Even if he said he was serious and flirted with her, but immediately got tired of her and changed his mind, then that means he was half fooling around, playing a game.

Edgar was showing himself like he had affections for Lydia, but his proposals and everything else must be just a temporary whim of his. If she were to take it seriously, then there was no mistake that she would be put through a terrible experience.

Lydia reminded herself that anew once more, and pledged to herself that she was going to have a more assured, resolute attitude towards Edgar.

And yet.

Because of the appearance of Til, in the end, things were turning out like Edgar wanted.

She wondered why things could have turned out like this, and took a glance over to him beside her with a feeling of resignation.

He must have been watching her the whole time, as their eyes met immediately.

Compared to Lydia's hair which was described as dirty, rusted-iron, his bright blond hair, which she envied so much, floated in front of her eyes by a breeze.

Edgar gave her a gentle happy smile, and it gave the impression like he was feeling pure joy at just being able to gaze at Lydia, but she couldn't imagine where it was about her, that was so apparently head-strong, unattractive appearance of her, that he could look at.

"It's quite the pleasant sunshine we're having. Even the singing of the birds sound like they are congratulating us," he whispered to Lydia in a quite personal close distance as they sat themselves down on a blanket that was laid out in the shadow of a tree.

Before she had realized it, he was holding her hand.

"Um, Edgar, shouldn't we stop in trying to use that little boy? We don't have any sure idea of what lies ahead, and it's questionable if I'm really going to become a mother anyway. And besides, he still isn't a human, so he should return to where it is he belongs."

"If we show him how close we are to each other, then Til would feel relieved and want to go home, I'm sure."

Lydia wasn't able to escape from the deceitful crook that snuggled up to her. That was because she couldn't allow herself to push Edgar away as usual while they were in front of Til.

"For his sake as well, couldn't you try to feel like you are enjoying being together with me?"

I guess I have no choice, but if she let herself give in like that just a little, he would take advantage of that opportunity.

She was well aware of that, and yet when the gentle sunbeams that were streaming through the leaves would wave and rustle, the color of the ash

mauve eyes that gaze at her would slightly change, making Lydia shaken and confused.

If it were a real couple in love then this area near this small lake that was located beyond the forest out of the city, then they would be able to submit themselves to a romantic mood.

Mingling among the hill berries bushes, there was a haze of small light yellow flowers that was a nice sight to the eyes. The dark green-colored lake was surrounded by thickets and groves of small trees and the tree leaves and plants and flowers reflected in the water surface and gave a decorative, magical atmosphere that isn't seen in the city parks.

It was a perfect place for a small picnic that was near enough to London.

Have you brought a woman to this place in the past? was the kind of mean question that came up to her mind, but Lydia somehow managed to hide it in the back of her mind.

Till was enjoying himself by chasing after a butterfly and running around. If she were to start a fight with Edgar here then he wouldn't want to go home at all. However, when Lydia was going to be quiet, then it was natural for Edgar to want to get ahead of himself.

“Lately, we haven’t had that much time to spend together.”

“We’ve been seeing each other’s faces every day.”

“Going out together has been a long while. I’ve been having small affairs and didn’t have any time. But you know, please don’t think that I’ve been ignoring or forgetting about you.”

“No big deal, it’s nothing.”

“I’ll make sure to compensate for everything, so you can cuddle up to me all you want.”

I could never do such a dangerous thing.

However, like he aimed for the timing when Till was looking towards their direction, he removed Lydia’s bonnet and placed a kiss on her head.

“Till, come over here now. Let’s have lunch.”

His attitude was if a light kiss was a daily part of their lives in such a natural way, as he called for little Till.

“Yees, Father.”

Till, who came running over to them, held out a white flower to Lydia.

“This was growing over there by the bushes. I thought Mother was sure to like it.”

It was an adorable lily flower. It was an early bloomer, but that could be Till using fairy magic to make it bloom. Of course, she didn’t dislike it at all, but it must be a flower that Till like instead. As Lydia was thinking that, she quickly changed her expression that was made sour because of Edgar into a smile.

In a place lit bright by the sun, Raven was setting out a simple table and chairs. On the table that was covered by a tablecloth, there were white plates and glasses that were taken out from the picnic basket and grape wine was being poured into them.

Edgar took Lydia’s hand and helped her up and in a mastered natural movement, he escorted her to the table.

For little Till’s sake, there were a number of cushions that were put one on top of each other on a chair, and then Raven gently picked him up and sat him down in it.

There was cold meat, herbed sausage and cheese, pickles and oiled herring and colorful gooseberry gam and honey.

It must have been a rare sight, as Till looked as he was having fun watching everything on top of the table.

“Oh, Mother, what is this?”

It was indeed a peculiar feeling to be called mother, but when Till made a carefree smile to her, Lydia made a smile somehow again.

That’s right, if this boy can feel relieved, then he is sure to return back to his friends. Even if she really was or wasn’t his mother, that was the only thing that Lydia could do right now.

“It’s a baked apple. Do you want a bite?”

“Oh, no, I’m still not a human yet, so I’ll just have milk.”

With both of his hands, he grabbed ahold of his glass, and put his lips to it with a delicious face.

“I want to hurry up and get born so that I can eat the same foods as Father and

Mother."

"That would be nice. If you were to be born, then the three of us should come back here again. Right, Lydia."

"Eh? Oh, yes...."

"Really? I can't wait. It's a pity that I won't be able to remember about today."

Just for an instant, Till made a sad, lonely expression. Perhaps he couldn't fight back the fear that that kind of time might never come.

".....We'll remember it."

Lydia said that so that she could relieve him.

And then, it was Edgar who looked happed as he agreed. Somehow or other, she still had the feeling like she was trapped in his scheme.

"And so, Lydia, when do you want to have our wedding?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, you know, we still are only engaged and still haven't made anything specific, but I'm starting to feel like I want to hurry up and get married. Since we have this opportunity, wouldn't it nice if we decided on the date in front of Till here?"

"That, that is...."

Since Till would look up to Lydia with eyes filled with expectations, so even as she was made irritated at Edgar's doings, she could only make a stiff smile.

"Edgar, let's first enjoy our meal!"

I'll get even with you once Till goes home.

As she secretly glared at Edgar, Lydia brought her glass to her lips.

When she looked up, she saw there were hazy clouds passing by in the blue sky. If she were to exclude Edgar's plot, it was quite the peaceful picnic.

As long as she didn't put Edgar in her eye of vision, then any day would be peaceful.....

Even if she were to think that, she wasn't able to take her eyes off of Edgar all this time.

As for that reason, she had a feeling like she knew why, but she didn't want to acknowledge it.

A breeze passed by the tops of the trees. As she watched the apricot flower

petals dance dancing around, but then suddenly a trickster gust blasted through and blown off Lydia's bonnet.

It flew up in a swirl and the pansy-colored ribbon got caught on a tree branch.

"Oh, no, in such a high place."

It was Raven who immediately tried to go and retrieve it, but Edgar stopped him and spoke.

"It's all right, we'll go and get it."

"Huh, what do you mean we?"

"Till, will you give me a hand for your Mother's sake?"

Till energetically made a nod, and Edgar effortlessly picked him up.

He carried the infant on one arm like he was a feather, and that made him appear unusually masculine.

He had a slender build, and gave a strong impression of elegance and that of a nobleman. With one spoken word, he could move and make people submissive, and she was impressed at his traits of a ruler, but she had the feeling like he had nothing to do with a closer, simpler masculinity.

His treatment of her as a lover and his sweet words always made Lydia nervous. It could have been the first time that she felt such a relaxing, comforting masculinity from him like this.

Was he a person who could properly protect and help grow small, fragile little ones?

What on earth was he thinking, thought Lydia as she hastily took a deep breath.

Edgar walked over to where it was right under the branch where the bonnet was caught and stopped. And then, he set Till on top of his shoulders.

"How is it? Can you reach your hands to it?"

"Ummm, just a little more."

Till stood up on his shoulders. It would be a disaster if his feet were to slip. Lydia forgot that he was a fairy and watched in suspense.

"You know, it's all right. Edgar, make him stop."

"Don't stop now, Till."

"Oh, I think I can reach it."

It was just when his tiny hand grabbed the end of the ribbon. His body wobbled

to the side.

“Ahhh, watch out!”

She thought he was going to fall.

Lydia kicked herself off the chair to stand up. However, Edgar’s hand had grabbed a tight hold on Till’s body that appeared like he was going to fall.

Still with his grip on him, he twirled the youngster around in circles. Till was circled around in the air and was letting bursts of laughter. He was grabbed onto as he was twirled around in the air like he was flying through the air, and instead of becoming afraid, he was enjoying it.

Even when he was hung upside-down, he was enjoying himself. He had complete trust that Edgar wouldn’t drop him.



Then Till was finally set down on the ground and he flapped his delicate wings which were useless to fly as he was still laughing with pure delight.

“Edgar....., what were you doing? What were you going to do if he got hurt!”

“It’s all right. I had a good grip on him.”

“But he nearly fell!”

“In order to go on an adventure, man needs to experience danger and

overcome it. Now, Till, go hand the worrisome lady her bonnet."

The little boy came dashing over to where Lydia was and puffed out his chest and held out her hat.

"Here, Mother."

His face was that of a boy who had pulled off a small adventure. He was feeling pride in his success after defying danger.

"Thank you...."

She wanted to give him a hug, but Lydia couldn't allow herself to let go of her worries and do such a careless thing.

If she were to acknowledge him, it would seem like she was going to acknowledge Edgar and him as a future husband.

Because Edgar and Till looked like a real father and son.

Edgar was actually thinking about marriage much more seriously than Lydia had thought, and there was a danger of her going under the misunderstanding that he might be able to make a happy family.

Lydia put Till on top of her lap after he fell asleep on the grass getting exhausted from playing, and she even let him stay on her inside the carriage on their way home. If it was while he was sleeping, she felt like she could be allowed to hug him even though she couldn't acknowledge him as her future child.

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"What is this thing. He's standing up and walking."

When Lydia came to work the next day, Till came into her work office immediately.

It seemed like he couldn't bring himself to go home yet, so he had spent the night at the earl house. She heard that Edgar wasn't here on some business, so he must be bored.

The one who spoke up in a puzzled voice after seeing Till was Lydia's partner, a fairy cat who could walk on his hind feet.

"Wow, a cat talked!"

"Whoa, a baby talked!"

The two of them who were the same height, both stood standing up straight as

they looked in surprise at each other. In the work office in the earl house, Lydia stopped what she was writing, and thought it was sure a strange sight as she watched them.

“Uh, just to let you know, Nico, he is a sprite of a stork. He isn’t a human baby yet.”

Nico curved his head around to take a look at Till’s back.

“You’re right, so he’s a stork fairy baby. Why is he here?”

“Mother, this cat is wearing a necktie.”

“Mother, you mean Lydia?”

“Things are a little complicated. Oh, Nico, I’m in the middle of work right now but would you play with Till for a little while?”

Because she was made to accompany Edgar yesterday, she wasn’t able to finish her work at all.

“Whaat, I have to babysit.”

“Mother, I can play with this cat.”

He was much more understanding than Nico.

“I am not a cat! Be careful about that, Stork.”

“I’m not a stork either! Because I’m going to become a human soon.”

“Huh? A fairy becoming a human? I never heard of such a thing.”

“A cat wouldn’t know that.”

“So you’re a runt fairy who just got born. If you can keep up with me then I’ll play with you.”

Nico slipped out through the door with his slim body. Till went dashing after him as well.

“Be nice to each other!”

As Lydia shouted out to them, she sat down to her desk again.

In their place, a maid came into the room. She placed a new letter asking for the help of a fairy doctor on the corner of the desk.

“Thank you.”

As Lydia said that and looked up, she realized that the young maid was the girl who was in Edgar’s office yesterday.

The girl kept her face down as she made a little bow. She looked like she wasn’t

in good spirits, and Lydia guessed that might be because of Edgar's cold harsh treatment.

And then, as the girl was about to leave the room, she suddenly stumbled and crouched down on the floor like she was going to fall.

"Oh, you! Are you all right? Shall I go call for someone...."

However, she grabbed ahold of Lydia's arm as if to stop her.

"I'm fine. I'll get better in no time...."

Lydia figured that if the head maid were to find out the girl would be yelled at, so she decided that the girl should rest here for now.

Just when Lydia was going to lend the girl her should and help her up, someone else gave out their hand. The one who picked up the maid girl was Raven.

"Where shall I set her down?"

He was just his usual self like he was talking about some piece of luggage.

"Oh, could you lay her down on that sofa."

He promptly did as he was told.

"Thank you, Raven. Um, I'm going to have her rest here for a bit."

"I think it's best for her to have something to eat. Lately, Connie hasn't been eating anything."

"What? Is that true?"

Lydia thought that the girl might not be able to let food down her throat from the shock of her lost love, but then, in the next moment, there was something that got stuck in her mind. He was someone who was nearly indifferent to anyone else than Edgar, so why would he notice something like a maid not taking her meals.

"Why do you know something like that?"

"I was ordered to keep an eye on her."

In other words, by Edgar?

Lydia became irritated, and she left the maid named Connie by herself and pulled Raven out of the room. In the hallway, she lowered her voice to talk to him.

"What is that, what do you mean? It's distasteful to monitor the woman he casted off."

Raven seemed like he didn't understand her meaning, as he tilted his head to the side.

"I happened to hear it. Just when Edgar was bringing up ending their relationship to her. To go and put his hands on a servant, and then cast her aside, it isn't something a gentleman would do!"

"That is not true."

"What is not true! He said that his feelings for her died down to her face!"

Raven didn't move one inch keeping a face like he was upset. He was a young man, who had a small build and of Asian descent, but before this job, he was an exceptionally skilled bodyguard. When she was glared by him, it made Lydia a little nervous and she eased her body back.

However, he must of just been thinking about something in his head.

It seemed like he was thinking things over in his mind for quite some time as he remained silent, but eventually, he opened his mouth.

"He was talking about me."

"Huh?"

"Lord Edgar had been talking to her in my place."

"Y.....You were with Connie?"

That's impossible. She could only think that it was a statement to cover for Edgar. In the first place, Raven wouldn't talk to anyone unless that was something necessary for his job working under Edgar. Lydia wondered what kind of conversation he would have with a lower ranking maid.

And besides, she had clearly stated that there was a class difference between them.

Lydia tried to calm her fuming rage somehow and took in a deep breath. Even if she took out her anger on Raven, it was meaningless. Because the one who was to blame was Edgar.

"Anyhow, would you mind bringing her some warm milk?"

Making a nod, Raven walked off, and Lydia turned her heels to return back to her office. Connie slowly lifted herself back up and looked over at Lydia.

"I'm terribly sorry, Miss."

"It's all right. But it's not good for you to not take your meals. I can understand

that you are feeling bad after a romantic breakup...."

"Why do know about that?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I just happened to hear when you were talking."

".....I see."

"Um, try to feel better."

Was the only banal thing she could say. Connie drooped her head and dabbed the corner of her eyes with a handkerchief.

"I believed in him..., I think I can't fall in love with a man anymore...."

Lydia's eyes were completely locked onto the girl's handkerchief.

The silk that had lace in it, was a high rate one that a gentlewoman would use. One would think that it wasn't something a maid girl could buy, but then it could have been given to her by Edgar.

More than getting upset at Edgar, Lydia felt an unrecognizable pain in her chest and then her eyes fell to the embroidery on the handkerchief.

A pure white lily flower.

It was the flower that Till gave to Lydia. He said that he thought Lydia would like it.

What if, it was the flower that this maid liked?

A girl who distrusted men. Who lived and worked in the earl manor. The conditions were met.

Perhaps, Till's future mother is.....

"Here is the milk."

When Raven appeared, Lydia vigorously stood up.

"Raven, Edgar has come back hasn't he?"

"Yes."

Just as she heard that, she went rushing out of the room.

The place where she went running into, was Edgar's office. If it was his private time during the day, then he was sure to be spending it here.

Lydia just barely made a knock on the door before opening it, but then Edgar just made an unaffected, pleasant smile as usual and stood up to greet her.

"Hello, Lydia, good timing. I need to find a nanny for Till, so I was thinking

about asking for your opinion. Because don't you think it needs to be someone who can get along with you, right?"

Huh? A nanny?

"I don't care about something like that!"

"You don't need a nanny? But you will have the duty as a countess, so you aren't going to be able to spend all of your time with our baby."

"That's not what I mean, I'm not Till's mother. It's Connie, the maid."

"Connie? The newly employed maid?"

"That's why, Edgar, marry her."

"Lydia, what on earth are you talking about?"

"It seems after she was rejected by you, she can't trust men. At this rate, Till won't be able to be born. Everything is your fault, so you should take responsibility. Since, she still has feelings for you."

"Hold on just a moment, I have nothing to do with her."

"It's useless to try and act as if you don't know. You were talking with Connie here about ending your relationship."

Ohh, he said as he made a sigh like he felt exhausted, which made Lydia feel like something was tearing in the center of her chest.

You are the worst kind of rake. She should have known that, but why, out of all the times, does she have to get the feeling like she was hurt.

"If it's about that, then you're mistaken. Lydia, I'm not the one who was in a romantic relationship with her, but it seemed like their breakup was getting complicated and tangled up, so I served as the go-between"

"I-it was you? It was you who made Raven say such a thing! You must be out of your mind to make Raven say an easily seen through lie like he was in a romantic relationship with a maid."

"Raven said that? He said that he was the one who was her lover?"

"He was doing his best for your sake."

"So, it was because I told him to keep quiet.Well, well, he sure has come quite a ways to be able to think up something so daring as that."

Even though he says he told his servant to keep quiet, he didn't show any signs of guilt of conscience.

And furthermore, it isn't the sort of time to be pleasantly surprised.

"Anyhow, you were the one who made Till acknowledge that you are his father, so even if Connie is from a lower-class birth, you have to make it work out somehow and officially marry her, you know? Don't you understand that? Aren't you good at doing something like covering up and disguising her identity?"

Lydia was even more irritated at Edgar's nonchalant attitude, and couldn't help but speak in a harsh, threatening tone.

And then, Edgar must have become offended, as he knitted his brows like he was in a bad mood uncharacteristically.

"Do you seriously think that?"

".....If she remained hurt, then it isn't fair for poor Till."

"So you believe that I'm that kind of man? You couldn't think that it was some kind of mistake?"

But, it's Edgar we're talking about. He was someone who was good at lying and deceiving people.

She was backed up against the wall by Edgar who came walking over to her. If she was approached by him in this situation, it was dangerous. Lydia instantly thought that she needed to run and she tried to step backwards, but Edgar grabbed her arm with a tight grip.

That grip was unusually strong and painful. She became afraid, but it appeared like he was the one who was feeling pain, so Lydia didn't have any idea of what she should do and remained being pierced by his glare.

"If I did as you said, then would that make you satisfied? I have been saying that I attracted to you, and yet you say that I should marry a different woman? Does that mean you don't care about my feelings?"

Feelings.

"You are the one who isn't thinking about my feelings at all. I've been refusing so many times, but you went ahead and said I am your fiancée and pulled Till into this.... But, that does mean that you were in a relationship as you were putting on a good face to me, right?"

If she said something like this, then it would anger him all the more. Even if she

thought that, there was distrust towards womanizers inside Lydia so big that she couldn't anything about, and so she thought it was unreasonable that Edgar would get offended.

"You just want to make a girl who happened to catch your attention to do as you want. You are sure to become tired of me in a matter of time. If we were to get married, you know that it won't be easy to separate, right? Even if your feelings die out, do you think that there wouldn't any harm since you could tie down a fairy doctor? And besides, are you saying that you want me you quietly watch as you go around and fool around with other women?"

Lydia couldn't stop herself before she finished what she said.

Suddenly, he let go of her hand like he became exhausted.

"....All right. Then, I'll go and propose to her or whatever. You can go and tell her yourself."

Those words of his that sounded so cold, brought a sharp pain to Lydia more than her arm that was just gripped very tightly.

Rather, she felt suffocated and went running out of the office.

"If that's what you really want!"

Edgar's voice which was thrown at her, still ringed in her ears even after she returned to her office.

Connie was nowhere on the sofa, and so Lydia slumped down to sit on the sofa by herself.

Edgar said that he was going to propose to her.

This way Connie won't remain hurt, and eventually Till will be born as the child of the earl family.

It was just that the setting at the calming picnic of yesterday was going to be something that Lydia won't be able to participate ever again was all.

It wasn't going to be Lydia anymore that was going to find out about an unexpected side of Edgar at an unanticipated moment.

This is stupid. That's a future that couldn't possibly happen in the first place.

And yet, Lydia became heavily depressed and hung her head. And then someone tugged at her hair that was hanging like that.

When she looked up, she saw that Till was looking towards her like he was

worried.

“Till, what is the matter? Weren’t you playing with Nico?”

“Mother, were you treated badly by Father?”

“Eh...., no, nothing like that.”

Till could have possibly heard them when they were having their argument.

It isn’t right to have a fight in the presence of a child, she thought and made a troubled smile. She was completely under the mindset of a parent.

Even Till had nothing to do with Lydia’s future just like Edgar.

“It’s all right with me that I won’t be born into an earl family if Mother isn’t going to be happy. Even if it wasn’t a rich family, as long as it’s a father who doesn’t treat Mother badly...”

“Uh, um, Till, it isn’t him treating me bad, but just that our opinions were going against each other. Edgar would make a wonderful father. You like him, don’t you?”



Till honestly responded with a nod.

“Even yesterday, when Mother wasn’t here, he played with me. We played

pirates - when I came with a slayed pretty lady, the captain would give me a reward."

"The captain....?"

"Father."

She thought that Edgar's idea of playing games probably wasn't good for a child's education. However, Lydia wasn't in any position to opinion about that.

"Edgar likes you as well. That's why it's all right even if he isn't your father."

"Then, does Mother like Father Edgar?"

He was a flirt and irresponsible, but there were times when she could admire him. That's why, she faintly realized that she wasn't able to completely push him away.

"Then would you two be good with each other from now on?"

However, that could be why she couldn't forgive the part of him that fooled around with women.

Lydia bended her legs to kneel down and took both of Till's hands.

"To tell you the truth, your real mother isn't me. I actually don't live in this house, you heard that your mother lives here and came here, didn't you?"

Till made a puzzled expression and titled his head.

"There's a girl named Connie who works as a maid here. I think she is the one who you came to see."

"She's my mother?"

"She almost near complet distrust with men, but I think it will be all right. She happens to have feelings for Edgar. And well.. it seems like he also bending towards getting back in a relationship with her, so I'm going to go and tell her that in just a little bit."

I need to talk to Connie as soon as I can, but even though Lydia thought that, her body still wasn't able to stand up.

Ohh, I still have my work from this morning left unfinished. It would be all right that I do it after I get that work done first, I'm sure.

She thought that as if in excuse.

I have been saying that I was attracted to you, and yet you say that I should marry a different woman?

She wondered if doing this was really the best thing. She wondered if what she was doing was denying Edgar's feelings.

What he said sounded like it came from his heart - without any time to act. When she got confused like that, she became more and more unable to stand up. She couldn't even realize that Till had soundlessly left the room.

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I thought that when I'm born, the first moving thing I see would be my mother. Till was still a stork spirit and wasn't a human baby, but when he awakened in this earl manor and opened his eyes a crack, the first thing he saw was Lydia and in that one glimpse, he immediately liked her.

She was looking down into him and made such a gentle smile. He was sure that she was his mother.

However, Lydia said that wasn't true.

If she was saying that, then Till's mother must be the girl named Connie.

But more than that, Till felt pain at seeing how Lydia looked. She appeared so happy yesterday, but today she seemed in pain.

Father Edgar says he wants to marry Mother Lydia. He definitely said that yesterday and Till has only heard the name "Lydia" filled with love come out from his father's lips.

He never heard the name Connie.

But his mother named Connie loved Father Edgar and Father had gotten in a fight with Mother Lydia and now wants to marry Mother Connie.

And the one who seemed in pain was Mother Lydia.

In order for Till to be born as a human, he came here so that the one who was going to become his mother wouldn't lose her feelings of love for another.

If Connie was Till's mother, then he needed to make sure that she doesn't lose her feelings of love.

However, he didn't want Lydia to be made sad because of him. Till couldn't imagine loosing that smile made for him at their first meeting.

"Connie, if you're going on an errand, then make sure to come home without making any other stops."

Till heard a voice and stopped on one of the stairs and peered down from the

shadow of the rails.

“Yes, Miss Rain.”

A young maid gave a quick reply to an elderly house keeper and was just about to exit from the kitchen door.

She must be Connie who Lydia was talking about.

She was a girl with black hair and around the same age as Lydia. However, no matter how much Till stared at her, there wasn’t any kind of deep emotion that rose out of him.

He didn’t know if a human baby was able to recognize any blood relationship just by looking at someone.

Only that to Till, who was a stork spirit, the very first smile that was made for him was the sign of a mother who he could snuggle up to. It was a strong impression that couldn’t be changed that easily.

Till followed after Connie.

Yesterday was such a nice weather, and yet today, there was a light drizzle falling in London.

The people passing by on the streets had their hats on deep to hide from the rain and didn’t pay any unnecessary attention as they walked with hasty steps.

For Till who was making himself invisible, it was natural that nobody noticed him.

In the moment Connie stopped before crossing a road, Till approached her from behind and sprinkled some fairy magic powder on her.

Connie hadn’t noticed anything, but with this, she was sure to lose her way back to the earl manor and would end up going around in circles in the same place.

While she was lost, he was going to have to ask for Father Edgar and Mother Lydia to reconcile with each other again.

Till hurried back to the earl manor.

The area around his wings felt unusually heavy, probably wet from the rain.

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Even when it turned to afternoon, Lydia still wasn’t able to bring herself to talk to Connie and she made it seem like she wasn’t able to put a stop to her work, yet her work pace wasn’t moving along at all, she made a sigh as she gazed at

the garbage bin that was filled with rolled up papers with her writing mistakes.

Just them, a butler with a panic-look came running into the room.

“Miss Carlton, there is an emergency. The young mister Till was found lying on his side by the kitchen door.....”

“What, Till?”

When she went dashing after Tomkins where he guided her, she saw that the small baby was laid to rest down in a wide, open bed.

Till was cowering his body together and looked as if he was feeling terrible.

“Till, what's wrong? Do you not feel all right?”

Lydia sat down on the edge of the bed and spoke gently to him, but he didn't make any response.

“Mister Tomkins, where is Edgar?”

“He still is out and hasn't returned. It was just when we sent out a messenger to inform him.”

“Oh, no, what do I do..., oh, a doctor...”

“Will it be right to call for one?”

Tomkins rapidly blinked his eyes that were set far apart with a look of confusion as he knew that Till was a fairy. There was no way a human doctor would know about any fairy illness.

“I'm sorry, I must be quite shaken up.”

She was the Fairy Doctor and yet she had no idea of what to do and that was infuriating for her.

But still, Lydia tried to hurry and think up of something.

There had to be a reason why this happened to Till. If she were able to pinpoint that, then she was sure he would recover.

Just a while earlier, she talked to him that there was no mistake that a maid named Connie was his real mother. He might have gone to meet Connie, and if that were so, there was a possibility that she knew something that could have happened to Till.

“Mister Tomkins, I'm sorry but could you go call for a maid named Connie.”

When Lydia suddenly thought of that and said so, the butler nodded and left the room. After a while, the house keeper Harriet appeared.

"Connie has left on an errand and still hasn't returned."

As Harriet said that, she wobbled her big, plump body like she wanted to complain about something.

"And I had said so many times for her not to go and make any stops. I'm sure she has gone to the manor that she was previously working at and prowling around that area. My goodness, it's always like this when I send her out on errands."

"The manor she previously worked at? I wonder if she wants to go back there."

"She won't be able to return because she was fired. If a maid has come to be close with the son of the house, then it's natural that the lord of the house would kick her out."

Lydia was completely taken by surprise and stared gapping at Harriet.

"Connie, she was with the son there....?"

"Oh, why, yes, she is quite an honest and open girl, but it seems like she's quite susceptible to falling in love and has made numerous problems at all the places she has worked. The son of the previous house was an acquaintance with our lord and he came asking for our lord's help because she said she would rather die than break her relationship with him. It was just when the young son had gotten a marriage offer and if this maid issue were to prolong, then the son said he was going to be kicked out of the family by his father.... That is quite a terrible thing in itself; you are aware, that a maid kicked out of her post will have a terribly difficult time finding employment anywhere without proper papers? Since it is a matter of life and death for a girl who doesn't have anyone to rely on, there isn't any surprise that she would cling on the thought of suicide."

"Then Edgar did that for the sake of his acquaintance and her-"

"He made it so that he hired Connie, and became the bridge between them so that there wasn't any troubles caused from their breakup. Our lord can be that kind of a person, but he wouldn't do anything that would hurt a girl who is in the weaker position. Even the son seemed like he wasn't able to hold his head up in the presence of my lord after that."

Edgar had said that it was her misunderstanding about any breakup with

Connie.

So that wasn't a lie.

And yet, she went and blamed everything on Edgar.

"Ohh, I'm sorry, I've gone on and blabbered on and on unnecessarily. I will have someone go fetch Connie. I'll let you know when she has returned," said Harriet.

Even when Harriet left the room, Lydia wasn't paying attention and was completely shocked at herself about coming to such a conclusion so quickly.

There wasn't any point in bringing together Connie and Edgar, and that only gave the both of them a sense of displeasure.

To prove it, she had gotten in a fight with Edgar.

On top of that, Till had even gotten sick, and Lydia didn't have any idea in what to do.

She felt so sick of herself and couldn't relax and as she was going around in circles in the room, Till opened up his eyes a crack.

".....Mother Connie won't be coming back home today. Because she has gotten someone else she likes, she has gone to go see that person."

She had no idea what he was talking about. This morning, she wasn't even able to eat anything because she hadn't recovered from the pain of a broken heart, and now she has a new love interest?

"That's why, Mother Lydia, please get married with Father Edgar... Don't you like Father?"

"Wh-what are you saying. I...."

And then, Lydia realized something and gripped Till's hand.

"Till, what have to done to her?"

Even as he made a suffocated face, Till tried to make a smile.

"Even if I'm not Mother's child, I still like Mother."

"....So you used fairy magic?"

If that was so, then Connie must have lost her way and wasn't able to return. There were many places in London that were dangerous, and there was a drizzle that was coming down.

If it were to turn dark at this rate, then there might be something awful that could happen to her.

There could of already been something that happened to her, and if that were to be so, then Till won't be able to be born.

Perhaps, it was because of that, that Till had become this sick.

He closed his eyes again, unlike falling asleep, Till looked as if he had lost consciousness and there were so many of his feathers on his fragile back that had fallen out.

At this rate, he might die.

“Lydia, how is Till?”

It was Edgar’s voice. It seemed like he came in a hurry, as Edgar came into the room still with his hat and stick in his hand, and Lydia went dashing over to him in a rush like she was going to cling onto him.

“Edgar, what should I do...,it’s my fault. I didn’t think about Till’s feelings and gone and said that Connie was his mother.”

“It’s all right, Lydia. Everything will be all right.”

Edgar said that even though he should have had no idea of what was going on.

Even when she was cradle gently in his arms, she had no time to spare to feel any embarrassment as usual, and as she felt relief instead at his strokes that combed her hair to relax her, Lydia continued to spill out her words.

“Till had come to like me and was coming to be affectionate towards me and yet....”

“It isn’t your fault.”

“But, such a small child is sure to feel hurt if he were suddenly told he has the wrong mother. And yet I....”

“Now, listen, Lydia, if you go and get upset like that, then Till won’t be able to relax. No matter what kind of sickness it is, it’s important that he can rest in peace.”

Lydia realized something and snapped her head up.

“Oh, I remember now, I have to go find Connie. She’s caught in fairy magic and can’t find her way back. If she doesn’t return back safely, then Till will die.”

However, Edgar didn’t let his arms off of Lydia and remained so as he called for

Raven.

“Let’s have him go.”

“He can’t, I have to go, he’ll be caught in the fairy magic with her and lose his way.”

“It’s fine, you have to stay here.”

Edgar moved his eyes and looked over towards Till, and saw his small tiny hand which grabbing tight onto a strand of Lydia’s hair unconsciously.

“I’ll go with him.”

By Raven’s footsteps, Nico appeared without anybody noticing as he said that. If it were Nico, then he would be able to help Connie return who was caught in the fairy’s magic.

But for him, who tended to find like that bothersome, it was rare that he went and offered his own hand to help.

“Thank you, Nico. You were also worried about Till as well.”

“Nnn, when we were playing, and I had jumped from the balcony to the roof, he wasn’t able to keep up and fell.”

“Whaat, goodness, Nico,”

“Well, even this runt is a fairy, so there shouldn’t be any problem if he were to just drop.”

But it looked like he was still bothered by it.

“So, let’s go, Raven.”

As Lydia saw off the two of them leave, she went over to Till and sat down.

Edgar also sat next to her and gently fondled with Till’s puffy hair.

As Lydia vaguely watched that, she was able to slowly calm down, and remembered that she had something she needed to apologize to Edgar about. It was Lydia who said such an offensive remark, but because Edgar treated her like nothing had ever happened, so she had completely forgotten.

Even now, Edgar looked over at Lydia and smiled at her as if to soothe her.

“.....I’m sorry, you weren’t the one that Connie was in a relationship with. I heard from Ms. Harriet, I...”

“Ahh, yes, I was quite hurt.”

He said that with a smile, but Lydia only felt her guilt grow stronger.

"I'm really had lost my temper, and didn't properly hear what you said and said quite some horrible things."

"It's all right. It just means that all I had done till now was that of a man who made you feel uneasy. But, you know, there will never be such a thing as me getting tired of you or my feelings dying off. If you would agree to our marriage, then I guarantee you will never regret it."

"....Yes."

"Are you thinking I'm just saying that?"

"Um, that's...."

"You won't say something like I don't even have a chance to redeem myself?"

".....I understand. I'm sorry."

"To have you apologize to me, it's actually quite arousing."

I wonder if he really has the intention of redeeming himself.

She was in the position to apologize and so she couldn't allow herself to get angry, and so Lydia remained confused as she was gazed at by Edgar and made to turn her face red.

"Have you understood that I'm a gentleman who wouldn't put his hands on a maid?"

"Yes."

"But, if you were a maid, I'm sure I would try to win your affections. Even if you were a queen, I would sneak into your room ready to face the guillotine."

When she heard him say such over-exaggerating things as usual, she felt there wasn't any more uneasiness from their fight.

That's why at the moment, she didn't feel any displeasure at his sweet lines and hot gaze.

It was unusual for her, but Lydia felt that she was glad to be by Edgar's side. He was looking after Till with her, and he made sure to soothe her nervousness with a brightness that didn't give the impression of gravity or seriousness.

She was honestly glad for him to be here as he placed a loving kiss on Till's forehead.

"Lydia, you really did feel unhappy if I were to propose to Connie, didn't you?"

And he was his usual self with his overly high regards for himself.

“....I don’t know.”

However, Lydia really didn’t know and could only let the stubborn side of herself fall back in the shadows and give that kind of honest reply.

“That is quite a rare opportunistic reply.”

“Y-you think so.”

“I’m just glad that I wasn’t denied.”

Edgar took Lydia’s hand into his and made her hold Till’s hand.

“Till is sure to be fine. Since he is our child, let’s be sure of that for him.”

Lydia honestly thought that she hoped that were so.

If Till could stay with them, then Edgar wouldn’t be the usual irresponsible flirt and appear like someone reliable who can treasure family.

It was Lydia who wasn’t able to believe that part of him even though it could be his true self.

However, right now, she thought she could believe in Edgar for Till’s sake.

“See, even Till is trying to fight.”

Lydia felt a tiny hand grip back on her fingertip.

Edgar cradled Lydia’s shoulder. She didn’t feel like escaping as she usually would because she must have not sensed any kind of frivolous, flirtatious behavior.

He was strongly supporting Lydia who was worried about Till and was so afraid that she could break.

“Edgar, you, you look similar to my mother.”

Her tension eased down, and when she tried to come up with something to say, that was what came out of her mouth as it was just on her mind.

“Is that so?”

However, Edgar only listened to Lydia’s incoherent words like it was interesting.

“....When I was young, I had fallen out of a tree once. Father was very worried and was acting so frantic, but Mother said it was all right and didn’t get flustered at all. In the end, it was just as Mother said, but I guess I took after my Father.”

“Then, the two of us are able to become the perfect husband and wife. The

both of us together are sure to be able to support each other just like your parents you respect.”

.....I wonder if that could be true.

Lydia could only still whisper that in her heart, but she decided to honestly submit herself to his arms.

As she stayed like that, she was able to believe that Till will be all right.

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“Lord Edgar, I have returned.”

She moved her eyes loosely around the room at the sound of Raven’s voice. Lydia was still leaning up against Edgar, but he didn’t try to let her go, so she decided that it was all right to stay like that.

“Ahh, Raven, good work.”

From just those words, Raven had taken the hint that his work was done and gave a bow and quickly left the room.

Connie the maid who was standing beside Raven was left by herself, and as she remained there with no idea of what she should do, she looked at Edgar and made a timidly, nervous bow.

“Um, my lord, I am terribly sorry. For some reason, I had gotten lost and was able to get back.”

It seemed like she was in frights that she was going to get yelled at when she was brought before the lord of the house.

“I have no intention of firing you. More than that....”

“Is that true? Oh, thank goodness!”

Connie seemed to relax as she let out an energetic voice. She had a completely different impression from when she was in bad spirits this morning, but all was all right as long as she felt better. Lydia finally remembered that she had the girl brought back for Till’s sake and so she stood up.

“Connie, I have been waiting for you.”

“Oh, Miss, thank you for what you had done earlier. I feel much better now. Because, I think I will be able to start a new love!”

“A new love?”

Lydia was surprised at what the girl suddenly said. It was just this morning that

the girl was depressed as she was thinking about the lover who abandoned her. Isn't it just a bit too quick.

"He had been watching me for a little while now so I had been thinking about him, but when I had fallen down in miss's room, he had brought me some milk, and I thought what a nice person he is. Even just now, when he came to fetch me, he would look at me strongly as he didn't say a word. Although, he's a silent type, I'm sure he's someone who can think of someone with all his heart!"

Could she be meaning about Raven?

Raven had only been ordered by Edgar, and so wasn't that why he had been keeping an eye on Connie.

And furthermore, even about the milk, that was because Lydia asked him to do that.

"I'm glad to hear that. Although love is important, work is also important."

When Edgar said that, she must have gotten embarrassed about how overly excited she was, and solemnly made a 'yes' reply.

Lydia was completely stunned as she watched Connie leave the room.

"Is this all right? She's under the wrong impression of Raven."

"There shouldn't be any harm? Before Raven can realize Connie's affections, I think that her love interest will have switched to another man by then."

"B-but, oh, oh yes, I had Connie come back because she was the one who was going to be Till's mother."

It was just when she was going to rush out and call for Connie.

"Lydia, it looks like Till is going to wake up."

She turned around at Edgar's voice and saw that Till was sitting up on top of the bed and had a grip of the covers and looked at their direction intently.

He wasn't showing any signs that he was sick. Other than how his lightly pigmented hair looked like it had grown a little longer, he appeared the same. Was what she wanted to think.

However, Till was different from how he was before.

In place of his weak-looking wings where his plumes had fallen out, there was a pair of large wings that looked as if they were as long as his height.

They were magnificent stork wings that had black wind breaking feathers.

“I, I wonder what has happened to me....”

It looked like Till didn’t know what was going on as he tried to turn his head around to check his back.

“I-it will be all right, Till. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Even though Lydia didn’t know what was going on, she came running over and tried not to make Till fearful.

“He must have turned into an adult, I’m sure.”

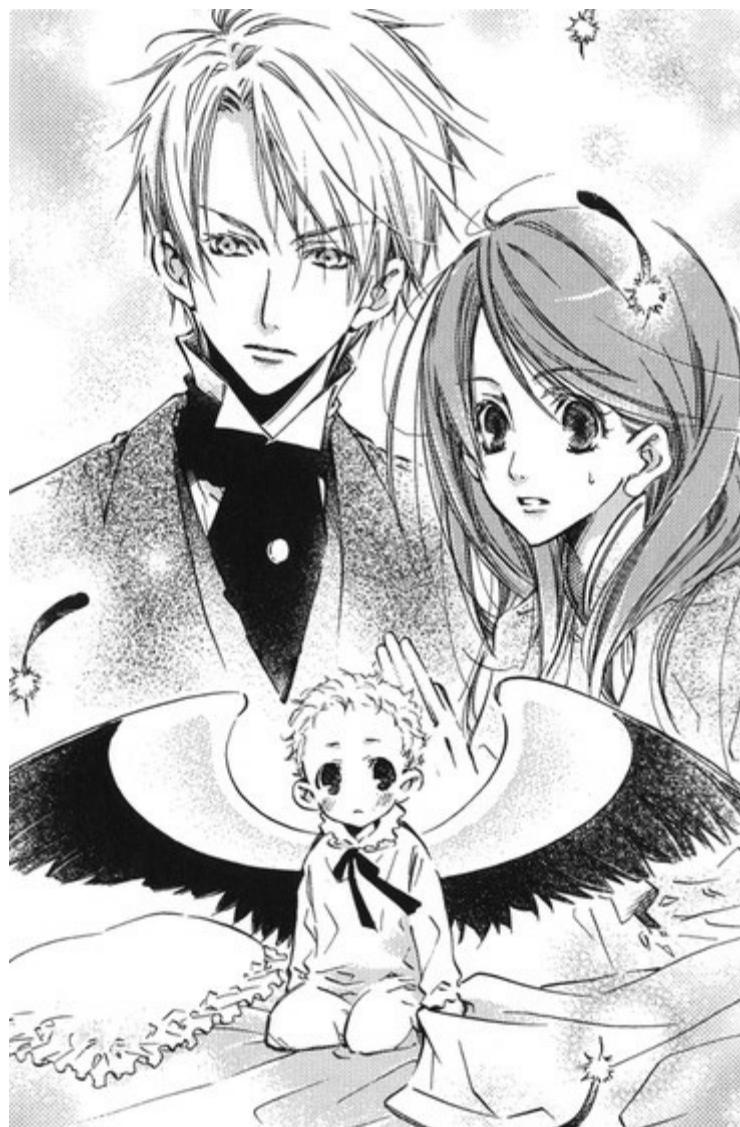
Edgar said half-heartedly.

“Adult, but he still has the body of a baby.”

Lydia lowered her voice and argued back to him, but there was another voice that came from the window.

“It is just as the lord earl says.”

Right by Nico’s side, there was a stork bird resting its wings there. The one who must have spoken just now, looks to be that stork.



“Grandpa...”

Murmured Till.

“What, he’s Till’s grandfather?”

“He says he’s the head of their clan. It seems like he had been going around searching for the little runt. When I was searching for the maid, I happened to come across him, and when I mentioned about the runt’s sickness, I had him come back here with me.”

Nico puffed out his chest with pride in his accomplishment.

“That little one is not sick. It’s just that his chick plumes were replaced.”

The stork jumped off of the window and hobbled over to where they were and spread out one of his wings and craftily made a bow.

“Lord Blue Knight Earl, and my lady, Fairy Doctor, I’m terribly sorry for the trouble that was caused on you. We stork fairies originally do not have any parent birds. However, when we are chicklings, it seems that the little ones are susceptible to loneliness that they do not have parents when they witness a stork parent and child. And it was there that it had become the norm for the rest of us to say to them that they can gain kind parents when they eventually become human babies. Although, of course that is superstition.”

“Superstition? Then, I wonder where the superstition that a stork comes to deliver a human baby came from.”

When Edgar leaned his head to the side, the elderly stork replied solemnly.

“That is because when we take the form of a human, we are only able to transform into a baby.”

In one blink of an eye, the elderly clan head turned his shape into that of a newly born infant.

“There have been a number of humans who have witnessed us in this form when we were mingling with storks from the past.”

“....I see.”

The clan head immediately returned back into his stork form, but Till still remained in his baby form and was put in shock from finding out he couldn’t become a real human.

“Grandpa....., then, it was a lie that I was going to become the child of this

family?"

"You were an exceptionally lonesome one, so I wanted to let you have that dream. If it were this Blue Knight Earl family, then I thought there would be no harm in you coming to take a look now and then and so I told you, but it seemed like one of our clan members had played around with you by coming up with the lie that your mother had no trust in men."

Which means, Connie also wasn't Till's mother.

"You understand now, now that you are no longer a chickling. You have to become a fine stork spirit now."

Being told so by the head clan elder, Till made a lonesome ace and looked up towards Lydia.

Till had completely grown up in such a short timeframe, so he must have a good understanding of this. However, it wasn't like his sad, lonely feelings were going to disappear with reason.

Lydia didn't think but embraced Till in her arms.

"It will be fine for us to look after Till! Until his feelings are set, he could live here with us... Right, Edgar?"

"Yes, of course."

Mother, murmured Till in a hush. Lydia thought please don't go so soon.

However, he eventually let go of Lydia and stood straight up and looked over to their direction.

"Father Edgar, Mother Lydia, thank you very much. Although it was a short while, it felt like I had become the real child of this family and it made me so happy."

With a face that could nearly cry, he said that with a smile and he spread out his freshly reborn wings out wide.

He no longer was a child. There was no way to keep him from leaving his nest.

"Goodbye. I hope the both of you don't fight anymore."

There was an abrupt gust of wind that must have been made from the beating of the stork fairy's wings.

Lydia closed her eyes for a second, but what she saw when she opened her eyes again was the sight of two storks who were flying in a circle in the air outside

the window.

Eventually, the two of them disappeared off into the clouds were floating in the sky after the drizzle in the horizon.

Lydia still wasn't able to accept the sudden parting, as she picked up the feathers that had fallen on the bed.

She felt so lonely and couldn't move from the window side she was standing by.

She felt the presence of Edgar standing behind her. He spread his arms out around to embrace Lydia and cradled her along with Till's feather lovingly.

"It will be all right."

Lydia was supported at his words.

"Although it was a short while, Till was indeed our child."

"Yes....., you're right."

Unusually, Lydia gave a nod with the feeling like their hearts were one.

Because Till had been with them, she was able to be honest in front of Edgar. Inside Lydia, his presence had indeed increased.

From now on, she was going to trust him a little more, and thought that she wasn't going to easily start a fight with him.

Since, the symbol of happiness, a stork fairy had come flying down to them...

"I was so happy when you said that the two of us would look after Till. I thought you could have come to acknowledge me just a little."

"....Yes."

"Did you start to want an adorable baby?"

"Yes...."

"Then, I'll help you with that whenever you want."

A soft kiss was planted on her ear, and Lydia finally realized the meaning of their conversation and turned bright red.

She became so embarrassed and flustered, that blood had risen to her head and the honest feelings that were in her just now blown away, and she had used all her strength to slap away Edgar's hand.

"No, thank you, that will be unnecessary!"

Short Story - Lessons on how to win the heart of a gentleman

A coffee house located in Piccadilly called “Nightingale House” was one of the renowned businesses where the esteemed people of London came to gather. Even though it was a place to drink coffee, it was also a high-class restaurant that prepared and served superb French cuisine, and once it turned dark, the seats were packed with finely-dressed people of the ton once again.

Tonight, there happened to be a certain young man who entered this restaurant.

The restaurant was beautifully decorated, giving the impression to customers like they stepped into a different world cut off from the outside where piercing-icy snow was falling and welcomed by the melody of a violin performance softly echoing throughout the house. The young man, who was guided by a waiter through the tables that were decorated with marvelous blooms of flowers, was the Earl Edgar Ashenbert. His blond hair seemed to sparkle brighter than the light of the chandelier and there were quite a few people who raised their eyes, even though they were in the middle of their meal, to look up at the side of his face which was so noble and handsome.

The customers of this restaurant were normally accustomed to acting like they didn't see anything, even if one of the customers was the Prince of Wales, so he shouldn't have been that rare of a guest.

And yet, he somehow managed to gather other people's attention as every time he met the eyes of an acquaintance he would lightly greet them, and when he finally reached his prepared seat, he made a smile to his friends who were long there before him.

“Hello everyone, sorry to make you wait.”

“Would you listen, Edgar? Paul here had apparently gone and wasted the invitation of a woman by giving her the cold shoulder.”

The gathering tonight didn't have any particular purpose. The familiar faces he

would see at clubs had just seemed to gather together and the topic of their conversation tonight was quite direct.

“Oh, so you hadn’t realized that you were being invited again?”

Edgar settled himself down in the chair that the waiter pulled out for him and set his eyes on a good-natured looking young man who was staring back at everyone with a confused expression.

“No, my lord, I had just heard that there was this mysterious nightingale painting hung here in this restaurant and so I came to see it with the woman who told me about it. That was all there was, and yet everyone here is making a joke out of it.”

Paul was one of Edgar’s friends and a newly-fledged painter and was explaining to him like he wanted his help.

In this ‘Nightingale House,’ a mysterious painting is hung out for guests and it was said that a song of a singing nightingale could be heard from it and that was something even Edgar had heard of.

However, most men and women knew the true meaning behind that rumor.

“I had been curious of what sort of gimmick was behind it, but the painting was just hung on the wall and there was no cry not sound coming out of it.”

Seeing Paul - who had no idea whatsoever about it - Edgar murmured ‘Oh, he’s in a critical state.’

He was a painter who was dull when it came to love. It would seem harmless as it was his character, but if he was an artist, then it could be said that his waste in not philandering was one loss source of inspiration.

Edgar had that thought and so he beckoned him with his finger and quietly decided to give him a word of warning.

“Now, listen, Paul. When someone says let’s go listen to the nightingale song singing during the night, then people would take that as meaning let’s spend the night together. Which means it’s just a cliché to invite the opposite sex.”

“What!...B-but, then why is there the story that a bird sings from inside the painting...”

“Do you know of the origin behind the name of this Nightingale House? It’s because there are numerous nightingale paintings hung all over the place. And

so, putting those paintings and the cliché from just now, into inviting someone because the bird inside the painting is singing means let's spend a romantic time together. The upper floor of this restaurant also happens to be an inn for lovers who are hiding from the public eye."

Yes, yes, nodded everyone else in agreement.

Paul was stunned, with his eyes gapping wide open and must have become completely taken aback as he didn't say anything and remained frozen for a while.

Their friends all individually went on with the conversation.

"You were given an invitation, and you only went and looked at the bloody painting?"

"A nightingale is a bird that sings a love song. From the past, number poets have written about that dull-looking bird singing about love. It isn't bad as a metaphor to help spend a romantic night with a gal though."

"So it sings, then what kind of painting was it?"

"Edgar, haven't you seen it before?"

"Of course I haven't."

"My, my, I thought I've seen you a number of times going up the stairs into the back...."

"I've forgotten about the past. I've cut my ties from those kinds of dissolute, shallow relationships."

"However, my lord, even your tardiness today means you were caught by some woman again, weren't you?"

Well, yes, he replied with a happy smile, and everyone made the same satisfied face.

"There is no way you could cut ties with women."

"So, what happened with the gal today?"

"You didn't even have to invite her to the inn above, did you?"

Edgar evaded all of the curious questioning with a smile in good mood as he looked over at Paul.

He had remained quiet and eventually drooped his head, so it seems like he had become completely depressed.

The goddess of love was sure to have a twisted personality. She's made it so that indirect seductive words, indirect rejections and the behaviors or manner that made one give hopes all ended out as silly misunderstandings. It was like the deity was secretly getting entertainment at how all the male and female lovers in the world were made upset and thrown into confusion from love.

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Around that same time, the girl who was being brought up in Edgar and the men's conversation: Lydia Carlton was just relaxing by herself in the drawing room of her house after Edgar had finally left.

He had said that he had somewhere to go in the evening, but Edgar suddenly said he would accompany Lydia home and came climbing into the carriage, but when they arrived at her family's house, he said "I hope you don't mind if I take a little rest" and suddenly made his way into her family home.

Unluckily, her father wasn't home and although her housekeeper was supposed to keep her eye on any visiting bachelors, Lydia ended up being stuck with him and had to keep him company.

On top of that, when it came to her father being absent, it was natural for Edgar to get ahead of himself.

"Did you know that it gives me such bliss by your eyes gazing at me like that?"
I am not gazing.

"It is so charming and adorable how you become so red so quickly."
....Isn't it almost time you have to go?

"If you say that you want me to stay a little longer, then I will forget about today's scheduled meeting."

It's not like I want you here.....

"Well, then, how about if you kiss me, I'll leave."

When she didn't hide how upset she was at how much he got ahead of himself, he just smiled as if nothing to fear and finally lifted himself up from his seat. Only-when he was about to leave he still didn't forget to place a kiss on Lydia's

hand.

Actually, for Edgar to act so sweet and how he came into Lydia's house was a daily part of their routine.

However, from Lydia's point of view, his open affections and how he treated her like his every day, only made her feel flurried and confused.

Edgar was the kind of person who was especially popular with women, and since he was a flirtatious rake who enjoyed that, it made him all the more hard to handle.

Even though she was asked for her hand in marriage, Lydia thought it would be terrifying to take a rake's proposal seriously and the more his attitude appeared more serious, then she wasn't able to refuse him steadily like she previously could.

Anyhow, Edgar had already left. It felt abrasive and irritating to be thinking about him even after he was gone.

Lydia decided to go to her room and so left the drawing room and climbed up the stairs.

And then, she heard some lively, laughing voices coming from her room on the second floor.

When she opened the door, she saw that there were small little fairies who wore green-colored clothing and were all gathered in a circle and dancing in front of the hearth.

They merrily dance as they sang and chanted. It was a banquet where all the hobgoblins had gathered to participate. The one who was in the center of them was the fairy cat who had been by Lydia's side ever since she was born.

"Nico, what are you doing!"

"Hey, there, Lydia, do you want to join us for a drink?"

His appearance was that of a long-haired gray cat, but he could speak like a human and was twirling around in circles on his hind feet. He was wearing a necktie and liked to act like he was a gentleman, but his drunkenness and his staggering, swaying gait made him look just like an old man.

For some reason, there was a barrel of scotch that was set down by the windowsill. The fairies must have carried it here, but she couldn't imagine if

there could possibly be something more mismatched as a barrel of spirits in a young girl's bed chamber.

Thanks to it, there was an immensely strong smell of spirits in her room that could make one feel nauseous.

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't go ahead and start a feast in someone else's room."

Even when Lydia came stamping into her bed chamber, the hobgoblins continued to joyfully dance. They were a kind that hated to be seen by humans, but it seemed like they were fine since they knew that Lydia was a Fairy Doctor. Lydia had a born trait - the ability to communicate with fairies. She decided to become a Fairy Doctor by using this talent that she shared with her late mother. From the past, in this country of England there were humans who were able to get close to fairies and their secrets by gaining the trust of fairies, and lent their knowledge so that human and fairies could live in harmony. However, coming into the middle of the 19th century now, perhaps due to society not believing in the existence of fairies no longer, the task of a fairy doctor had become difficult for people to understand.

Fortunately, Lydia was hired by Edgar who possessed the title of the Earl of Ibrazel, the Fairyland but was completely clueless and had no knowledge about fairies, so she was spending her days busy with work.

Because she had been spending all her youth with fairies, she was constantly labeled as an oddball, but Edgar was one of the rare people who properly understand her.

Only, it was a problem how he would try to flirt with her every time he saw her face.

"But, the thing was, Lydia, a nightingale kept on saying it wanted to meet you."

"Eh? Nightingale?"

Nico fixed his eyes towards the barrel of scotch, but Lydia couldn't see anything. She got closed up to it and squinted her eyes to look closer.

(Hel--lo, are you Lydia, the Fairy Doctor?)

She heard a fair, beautiful voice that rang out like a bell. When she pushed her face closer to the corner of the barrel, she saw something like a three-inch clear, glass sculpture figure faintly move.

She could barely make out a young girl who had a pair of dragonfly-shaped wings.

Even if it was Lydia, who was able to see fairies clearly, this visitor was tiny and on top of that half-transparent, so she couldn't see very well. Because of that, they were called "Nightingales" as in figure-less fairies from the past by fairy doctors.

Of course, they weren't really nightingale birds.

Since they possessed beautiful voices, nightingales were sang in poems; and it was a rare sight for people to see them as they only chirped and twittered in the night. That was why it wasn't a surprise that most people didn't believe that it was a figure-less fairy that was actually singing.

In reality, a nightingale fairy sings with a marvelous voice. Their singing contains fairy magic so it has the power to bring to surface the happiness, sadness and all other kinds of emotions in people's hearts and disturb them.

There might have been some poets from the old ages who could have heard the songs of the figure-less fairies singing as they mingled in the singing of the nightingale birds.

To the Fairy Doctor Lydia, she could understand that the pint-sized little fairy in front of her eyes was one of those. However, she didn't know that Nico had this kind of friend.

"How, what a rare fairy, where did you come from?" asked Lydia.

(From the forest. This is my first time in the outside world. Nico was kind enough to lead me out.)

"Did you know? If one is sung a song by a nightingale, their drinks become especially delicious!"

Said Nico, and then lovingly caressed the barrel, which means that was the reason they he brought along a nightingale to this banquet.

(In exchange for singing at this banquet, Nico said that he would introduce me to you.)

In a cheerfully good mood, Nico narrowed his eyes and nodded.

Lydia was starting to feel something bad coming on.

Because she had gotten the strange little feeling like Nico had agreed to hand

over Lydia in exchange of his wish being granted.

In the first place, even though he claimed he was Lydia's partner, he was immediately wired in by food and was a boneless cat and disappeared when danger was before them.

"Do you have to see a Fairy Doctor for something?"

(Oh, no, I just wanted to come and be of use for a girl like you. What a poor little girl, who doesn't know the feelings of falling in love!)

"Wh-what do you mean poor, little...."

(Why, yes, you seem like the type who is worth the trouble of teaching. I'm able to tell with just one look at that person. I can tell just how small of a little child your love for another is. But, everything will be all right; time isn't needed for one's love to grow. As long as you come across a wonderful meeting!)

Lydia took a step back at an ominous feeling at where this was heading.

"Um, excuse me, Nightingale, I'm actually quite fine at how things...."

(No, you can't! I will swear on my faith on this mission that I can grant you your love!) bursted out the

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The nightingale bird sings the song of love.

Just like that myth, the little fairy saw herself as an expert in love affairs, but for Lydia who had to have this little fairy follow around after her could only see as a nuisance.

She left the next day to go to work to the Ashenbert mansion as usual, but the calamity had already begun.

"Good morning, Miss Carlton."

Edgar's valet made his usual morning greeting to her.

"Good morning, Raven."

Even when Lydia had greeted him back, he wouldn't even faint a smile but that didn't mean he was in a bad mood but normal for him. This dark brown-skinned young boy of a man would do anything if it was for his master, but he was so emotionless to the point that it would be difficult for him to smile even when he was told to do so.

He didn't show any signs of interest beside Edgar but he didn't make any mistakes in who it was he needed to show respect to as that was Edgar's intention.

So to Lydia, who Edgar treated as his 'fiancée,' he treated her with considerable respect and paid attention to her needs.

Even now, he had just passed by but he went through the trouble and opened the door to Lydia's work office.

However, when Lydia was about to enter the room, she unexpectedly tripped where there was obviously nothing.

With that falling motion, she was going to crash into Raven, but then unexpectedly he swiftly evaded her.

Lydia had nothing to grab ahold to so she went falling flat onto the carpet.

"All you all right, Miss Carlton?"

Thanks to the soft cushion of the Ashenbert mansion's carpet, she didn't feel any pain or got hurt, but she made a sour smile at Raven's instant decision in evading the situation of being grabbed onto by Lydia and the sight of her clumsy, ungraceful position as she got herself up.

"Yes....,I'm all right."

Yes, Raven's consideration was only for Edgar and didn't always come out in Lydia's favor.

He had the idea that he shouldn't easily allow himself to touch the fiancée of his master. Being grabbed onto was out of the question.

"Please watch your footsteps."

He only left those words and left.

(Oh, my goodness, what a horrible man! If a woman were to nearly fall, wouldn't it be normal to steady her up?)

Lydia heard the nightingale's voice and swiped her head towards the source.

"Excuse me, but was it you that made me fall just now?"

(And I thought he was a good man. Lydia, he isn't right for you, don't even consider him.)

"Raven isn't like that!"

(Yes and isn't he a little bit too young? That's right - a man who is older than

you and can lead you would be more suited for you.)

“Please, would you listen to what I’m saying?”

(Oh, how about him?)

“Eh?”

When she eerily turned around, there was Paul standing before the opened doorway.

Lydia didn’t know if she should feel relieved or not - that it wasn’t that flirtatious Earl who undoubtedly was the worst suitor, but quickly put on a smile.

“P-Paul,.....good morning.”

This painter, who Edgar had closely acquainted with, had been spending some nights here in order to paint a picture that was going to be hung in this palace’s grand hall.

“Good morning. Um, would you be able to spare me a few minutes?”

As he said that, he looked around the inside of the room curiously as he must be searching for who Lydia had been talking to.

He hid the confusion of there being no one there with his good-natured looking smile and combed back his hair that was growing a bit too long with his hand that was covered in oil paint.

“Could I have you take a look at my painting? The earl had said that he wanted me to consider Lydia’s opinion as well. As you know, it is a fairy painting.”

“Why, yes, if it’s that, I would love to.”

Lydia made a pleased smile at Paul and tried to be careful of the nightingale that she had no idea was and left the room.

Even if she were to trip and fall, she made sure to leave enough distance between them so she wouldn’t have to grab onto Paul as she followed after him.

The wall-painting in the grand hall was one that portrayed a fairy’s banquet. A number of beautiful, elegant fairies with wings like thin silk were sprinkling about sparkling fairy dust as they danced.

“My, how marvelous.”

Lydia let out a sigh in admiration.

"Thank you very much. But if you spot something that doesn't look right, please don't hesitate and mention it."

"Oh, no, there isn't anything wrong."

Lydia tried to get a better look by stepping near the painting. She didn't forget to pay attention not to get too close to Paul.

However, out of the blue her hair was tugged very strongly.

"Oh, Lydia, be careful..." said Paul, but it was too late.

Her attention was distracted and when she tried to turn around, her elbow struck a plate of oil paint that was laying on the table near them.

The plate turned over and fell to the floor, splattering the paint in all directions.

"Oh, no, what have I done...!"

The paint was even flickered onto the wall. Lydia hastily reached out to the wall.

"Ahh, you can't, please don't touch it."

At Paul's terribly panicked voice, she managed to stop herself from touching it.

The painting that was hanging on the wall had no completely dried out yet.

If she were to touch it even the slightest, it would have turned out into a even more terrible disaster.

"I'm terribly sorry...."

As Lydia kept her hands to herself, she was in complete dismay. She had ruined the painting that Paul had put so much work into.

"Oh, no, everything's all right. If it's just this, then I'll be able to fix it right away."

There was only a tiny bit of paint that had gotten onto the painting. Paul examined it carefully and made a smile to try to relax Lydia.

"Is that true? But it's my fault that this happened... If there is anything that I can help with...."

"This wasn't your fault. I was the one who left out the paint."

If he said it like that, then it made her feel guiltier. What made it more awful, was that it was the fairy's fault that was stuck to Lydia.

However, if it was the nightingale's fault, then she couldn't let herself get in Paul's way anymore. She wouldn't be able to help, but just cause more trouble.

When she realized that, Lydia made another apology to Paul and quickly left

that place.

(What was that? Even he was completely hopeless. I thought he was kind, but how could he not show any consideration when a lady's dress had gotten dirty?)

She heard the nightingale's voice again.

Didn't the fairy understand that it wasn't the dress they had to worry about? But Lydia had gotten so depressed that she didn't have the energy to retaliate and returned to her office, and thought she had to do something about this nightingale and looked for Nico.

Normally, he would have arrived to the Ashenbert mansion much earlier than Lydia and should be relaxing as he enjoyed a cup of tea poured by the butler, but he was nowhere in sight.

She flipped up the table cloth and asked the hobgoblin that resided there in the Ashenbert mansion, but the fairy claimed that as soon as he finished his tea, he immediately left to go outside.

It was Nico who brought the nightingale. He should have realized what kind of situations Lydia had been going through. Which means-

He ran for it.

She needed to bring him back and get it in his brain that he must returned this troublesome fairy to where she came from.

Lydia took out her coat and ran out of the earl manor to search for Nico.

He shouldn't have gone that far off. As she was thinking that as she walked down the street, she didn't even reach a block until she realized that coming outdoors was a mistake.

For some reason, she became unsteady on her feet and was nearly falling into the room in front of a carriage.

From the carriage that stopped, a young man came rushed to come out and dash over to Lydia.

"Are you hurt anywhere, young miss?"

"Yes.....I'm fine, no worries!"

Lydia bolted off into a run before things turn to her falling into the arms of an unfamiliar young man.

She made sure to take caution as she walk far from the carriage road, but a vase came falling down from a window high-up on the building. It nearly came crashing down on top of her head.

“I’m sorry! Are you all right?”

A man leaned himself out from the window on the second floor, but Lydia turned her heels around before he had the chance to come down and was left with the option of running off.

At this rate, she wouldn’t be safe no matter how many lives she had.

“Nightingale, your idea of a meeting is much too dangerous!”

(The more dangerous the better. Doesn’t it make your heart beat even faster? That heartbeat will eventually turn into the beating of love.)

“Don’t be ridiculous!”

In the end, Lydia came running back to the Ashenbert mansion and closed herself off in her office and called for a maid and asked to have not one male visitor come to her room, and was finally allowed to breathe out in relief.

However, that didn’t mean that her problem was solved.

(To go and ward off any chance of meeting someone, you must be out of your mind.)

As she heard the cry of the nightingale, Lydia crashed herself down to sit on the chair that was set near her desk.

“Oh, for goodness sake, leave me alone for a while!”

From a drawer, she took out an ash-tree branch and started to wave it around. It was a sacred tree that had the power to ward off evil spirits and was also useful in evading the tricks and pranks of fairies.

Although, even if she could scare off the fairy for a period of time, in a case like this where she was specifically targeted, she knew that there wasn’t any use to it.

(You are so short-tempered. It’s because you are like that, that you can’t fall in love. Oh, well, it’s best for you to cool yourself down.)

As the spirit’s voice faded away, so did the presence of the fairy.

“Oh, my goodness, what should I do.”

“You don’t have to get so tangled up about it. Nightingales are impulsive and

capricious. Eventually she'll grow tired and will go home."

It was Nico's voice. He came slinking in through the window and stood up on the floor on his hind legs.

He didn't show any signs of feeling sorry, and since he would only comb his whiskers shamelessly, Lydia's anger intensified even more.

"When is that time going to come? I'm sure to get hurt before she grows bored."

She gave him a glare, but Nico acted like it was none of his business and sat down on the desk and crossed his legs.

"Ahh, then for the time being, why don't you pick someone to court? If you let the nightingale achieve her love counseling with that man then she might go home."

"Love counseling? What do you mean?"

"I wouldn't know that. It should be some kind of sure-proof method on how to capture the heart of the man you fancy. But, it's something that a fairy came up with. I can guess that her aim would be off."

That again, made her feel like it would bring more trouble. And furthermore, to decide on someone, wasn't something she could decide just for this time being.

".....I can't let myself do something so troublesome like that. Nico, you have to convince her to go home."

"She doesn't listen to what others are saying."

"If you knew that, then why did you bring her!"

As soon as she yelled out, there was a knock on the door.

Lydia quickly cleared her throat, but she was sure the knocker heard her.

She thought it was a maid and gave a reply, but the one who opened the door chuckling was Edgar.

"Who did Nico bring?" asked Edgar.

He was wearing a finely tailored frockcoat and silk necktie; even the elegant emerald in his cuffs and tiepin were shining. However, even more than his appearance, his glamorous golden blond hair and ash mauve eyes were that of a noble, and he could make others timid and fearful with just one glance.

The earl himself who was the lord of this grand mansion was carrying a teacup

and cup like a servant.

“Eh,.....uh, no, nothing.”

“This is unusual, are you having a fight with Nico?”

“Um, Edgar, why are you carrying the tea.....?”

“It seems like the maids had caught a cold all at once; they said they couldn’t stop sneezing. But, it seems like they were told they aren’t allowed to have any male servants approach your room, so I signed up for the job. It would be a problem if the maid’s cold were caught by you.”

It was the nightingale. She was sure to have done some kind of trickery on the maids. However, Lydia made sure to say that no men can come near, and yet out of all people this man had to come.

Of course, it wasn’t possible for the servants to be able to stop the lord of the house, but how could she have thought up the possibility that the earl himself would take away the job of his servants.

Lydia hastily got up from her seat and snatched away the tray from Edgar forcefully.

“I’m sorry. To have you do something like this.... I’ll do the rest myself.”

“You don’t have to be bothered, if it’s to carry some tea for the sake of the woman he loves, then any noble would do it.”

Edgar smiled cheerfully and made her set down the tea set on a table and made Lydia sit down in a near-by chair.

After doing that, he knelt down on his knee to peer into her face. She wondered what he was doing until he scooped up a handful of Lydia’s hair.

“What happened? It looks like there was powdered sugar sprinkled onto your caramel-colored hair.”

Edgar was the only one who described her rustic reddish-brown hair color - that didn’t have any bit of attractiveness to it - as caramel-colored. And to top it off, he described it as powdered sugar like it was normal, and that made her turn red because it sounded so sweet that one’s teeth could set on the edge, then Lydia turned her gaze to her hair.

“Oh, no, this is oil paint. I went to go see Paul’s painting this morning so....”

When the oil paint that fallen on the floor, it not only got onto her hair, but

seemed to have gotten her hair dirty.

“Ahh, you must not touch it so easily. Hold on just a bit.”

Edgar left the room once but then returned in no time carrying a bin that was filled with a paint solvent.

He dabbed that into a cloth and whipped out the oil paint that was stuck on Lydia’s hair.

“Um, I’ll do it myself.”

“It would be difficult to look from your side, wouldn’t it? Don’t move.”

It was so embarrassing for her when she was gazed at so closely and her hair was fondled with. That couldn’t be helped with so she remained still, but he clearly understood that Lydia was feeling uncomfortable and purposefully moved his hands slowly.

“All done. That should do it.”

When he finally stepped up, Lydia felt so relieved that she had let out a big sigh of relief.

“Lydia, it’s not like I am going to take a bite out of you, so it would be nice if you would relax a little more.”

I doubt that.

Honestly, she didn’t trust Edgar. If she let him see an opening in her, then she thought he would try to take advantage of her.

He smiled at Lydia who was filled with distrust, and the golden-hair wolf took the little lamb’s hand into his. As he placed a kiss on her fingertips, he let his teeth take a soft nibble.

He had just said that he wouldn’t bite, and look at him now.

She was feeling dizzy and couldn’t find the strength to retaliate but by the time she finally felt the anger rise up in her, Edgar was already on his way out of the door.

You skirt-chasing flirt!

She could only scream that in her head.

(My, my, my, what a charming man! To go through the trouble to take out the paint, why, he’s a true gentleman!)

At the nightingale’s voice, Lydia finally couldn’t take it anymore and stood up.

“Now listen here, would you stop what it is you’re doing?”

(Lydia, why don’t you choose him? I’ll help bring the two of you together.)

“He’s the type of man who doesn’t mind if it’s any woman.”

(That’s the kind of gentleman whose is worth winning the heart of! Which means it would be fine as long as he comes to have eyes only for you!)

It seemed like that only got her more rallied up, as the little glass-sculpture fae happily danced in the air around Lydia.

“It’s impossible to try and stop a nightingale. You should give up,” murmured Nico.

She wondered if she should give up and let the spirit go through with her lesson of love or whatever.

“Excuse me, Nightingale, if I go through with your love counseling, whether I succeed in winning a man’s heart or not, would you go home?”

(There is no way I wouldn’t succeed!)

“So will you go home?”

(Well, yes, since that’s as far as I can go in teaching about love.)

Lydia tried to think hard about it.

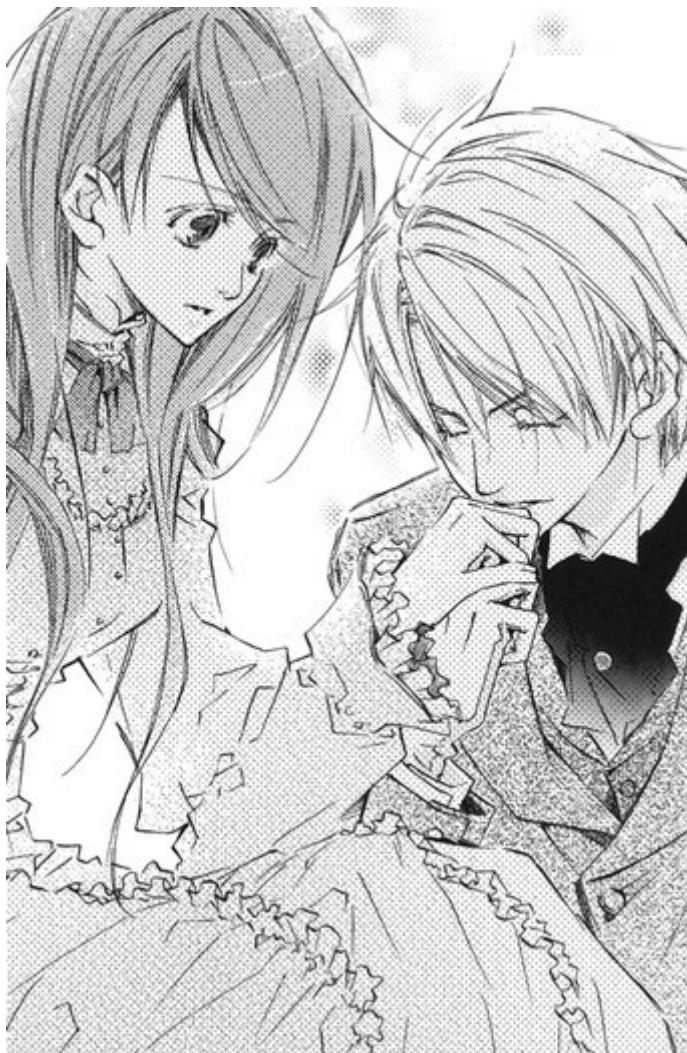
After quite a while to think it over, she finally lifted her head.

“By the way, what exactly is it that you want me to do?”

(You have to have a man kiss the tip of your eyelash. That way your feelings will reach him. And the feelings of love will also awaken in his heart as well.)

“.....Lashes? And why is that?”

(Because the feelings of loving someone are born from the tip of one’s lashes. Don’t people grow their feelings of love deep in their hearts as they gaze at that person? And when you sleep, you see that person’s dream, and when you awake you search for them, that’s why love dwells on a person’s lashes.)



"As expected from a nightingale, she sounds like a poetic Romanticist," teased Nico.

He slovenly made a yawn, which showed how disinterested he was.

However, she didn't have any time to be angry at Nico.

"Excuse me, Nightingale, but couldn't you make your counseling a little simpler?"

Anyhow, it was impossible for her to ask for a kiss. However, to have this spirit remain stay was too much trouble.

Lydia joined her hands together and tried to appear like she was pleading with the fairy, which made Nico mumble "Can't believe you call yourself a Fairy Doctor" but she couldn't pay him any attention.

(You're so weak-hearted. Oh, well, fine. I'm the ally of any timid girl in love. I'll make sure to teach you how to create a romantic atmosphere that will make him want to kiss your lashes. First of all, take him out to the city today.)

That sounded easier compared to a kiss.

(And then, while the two of you enjoy some window shopping, you will coax

him for a gift!)

She couldn't possibly do something as impudent as that. However, the nightingale continued explaining her plan to the nervous Lydia.

(To a man, there isn't anything happier than to be asked for a gift from a woman!)

There is no way that was true.

However, fairies tended to believe in something with extreme. As a Fairy Doctor, Lydia knew well and hard that it was impossible to correct them.

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When it turned to evening and it closed up to the time when Lydia had to go home, she finally made up her mind and called for Raven and asked him to deliver a message to Edgar.

She came up with the glossy excuse that she wanted him to help her look for a birthday present for her father and thought of the idea to invite him to the city with her.

However, in that moment, it seemed like there was a visitor in the mansion's salon. Raven, who was asked to deliver this message had told her that but still said that he would go and ask his master.

Thinking that since he was in the middle of greeting a guest, Lydia thought of canceling her message but Raven, who was loyal only to Edgar, must have been told to report anything if it was related to Lydia.

After a while, Edgar came to Lydia's office.

"Sorry to make you wait, Lydia. Let's go."

"Eh! What about the guest?"

She couldn't help it to be shocked, but Edgar didn't seem to be bothered and took her hand.

"It's just someone who gathers at someone else's house for no particular reason. They aren't worth being treated as a guest. They've gone ahead and started a card game."

"But, um, I'm sorry. I went and asked you something so sudden."

"If it's a favor asked by you, I'd be happy if it was every day. There's no need to

be modest."

But, this wasn't the only thing that she was going to ask from him. Even though she couldn't bring herself to ask him to 'kiss her eyelash,' to ask for a gift from him was also something quite difficult for her. She worried if she was going to be able to succeed in this.

As Lydia continued to mull things over in her head, they headed to a shopping area in Oxford Street.

"It's the first time for the two of us to go out like this."

She was taken out to all sorts of places by Edgar and made to accompany him in his entertainment, but he was right about it being the first time to go shopping together.

But, inside Lydia's head, that wasn't what was on the top of her mind. She wasn't able to come up with a good method about of hinting for a present.

"So, weren't we going to look for something that could be a good present for Professor Carlton?"

"Eh? ...Oh, yes, it's going to be my father's birthday soon. I was wondering about how gloves might be a good idea."

"Then, there's a good shop just ahead."

She was already starting to feel like she had failed. She should have had him accompany her in buying herself something. If it was a gift for her father, then no matter how she thought about it, there was no opportunity to ask it from Edgar.

She secretly made a sigh as she looked at the crowd around them. Even under chilling sky that was quickly growing dark, the main street which cut through the eastern and western part of London was filled with people and carriages and it was so crowded that it was causing a commotion.

The walkway that went along the shops were occupied with people who came to take a look or came to shop and each of them would stop their pace in front of the show window brightly lit. There were even suspicious-looking precious metals lined up in an unorganized fashion on table booths competing with each other.

At the end of Lydia's sight of vision, there was a male and female pair walking

closely to each other and went straight into a jewelry shop.

“Don’t you think that the two of us should go and buy a wedding ring from here?”

He might have noticed that she was following that couple - who obviously looked like it was right before their wedding - with her eyes. Then came such a jesting remark from Edgar’s mouth.

“Wh-what on earth are you saying.”

She quickly denied him, but wondered if she were to nod here, then that might win her a present, but then she realized what she was imaging, and was shocked at how improper and vulgar she was thinking.

It was crazy of her to think that in exchange with driving away the nightingale, it would mean Edgar was going to be shadowing her for the rest of her life.

“I’m joking. I was just thinking how nice it would be if that kind of day would come,” he said as he smiled and took Lydia’s hand and made it wrap around his arm.

He made it seem so natural in how he treated a woman as a lady which would always make her feel daunted.

“The desire I have right now is I want you to allow yourself to be coddled by me more.”

Lydia had no idea if all of his lines like this were something he said to anybody or if she was the only one.

And yet, for now, because she was the one who made this invitation to him, she thought it might be considered rude if she were to walk too far away from him and so left her hand on his arm and walk alongside him.

Occasionally, her eyes caught the sight of her reflection in the glass window. For her to walk along a man like this who wasn’t her father appeared very peculiar to her. For Lydia, who grew up in the countryside, she wasn’t comfortable in big crowds of people. On top of that, she wasn’t with her father but a complete stranger, and yet why on earth was she making such a relaxed face.

Was it because Edgar was so good at escorting her?

Lydia was unconscious about the part of herself that was relying on him as a man, and so was just wondering why that was in curiosity.

And then she drifted off in a train of thought. If she were to accept his proposal, then spending time like this together would become a daily routine. Surprisingly, it didn't feel unnatural.

"Oh, what do you think that shop is?"

She turned her face toward a show-window where music came streaming out so that she could take her attention away from that uncomfortable fantasy.

When they approached it, there was a clown figurine playing an organ as it moved humorously about.

"It looks like a mechanical music doll."

Edgar also peered down towards the back of the glass. There were a number of different kinds of dolls lined out.

"Yes, it is a music doll. How adorable... I wonder how something as small as that could move like that."

"Would you like to have them show you?"

"Eh,...No, that's all right."

It wasn't the time to be enjoying this outing.

Once she bought her father a present, the two of them should go choose a letter paper. And she could say something like a little pretty postcard as something to commemorate today....

Because Lydia was thinking up something like that, her mind was half in the clouds.

"Since we came here, let's go take a look. If there is something you like, I would love to give you that as a present. In memory of today."

"Eh!"

"You don't have to be that surprised."

That was so unexpected that she was completely astonished. It was perfect timing.

However, Lydia suddenly felt timid. The unnecessary worry filled her mind that she might have made a greedy look on her face.

"Wh-what are you saying.I can't receive a gift without any particular reason."

At the same time she felt pressed, Lydia responded with her usual closed mind attitude and although she realized that she was the one who ruined her own

plan, it was too late.

On top of that, she even got disappointed at Edgar's sourly made smile.
I'm such an unendearing girl.

At this rate, there was no way that the atmosphere between will become something so sweet enough for him to want to touch her eyelashes.

First of all, it was impossible for Lydia to try and pretend to coddle up like a girl in love.

She started to walk off with a state of mind of resignation.

Even when an oddball girl, who had been spending all her time with fairies from her childhood, had reached her marriageable age, she had never received the affection of a man.

Lydia had always thought that she didn't have any appeal at all.

Edgar was a natural rake who didn't chose or distinguish who it was he flirted, and so he would treat her as a lady, but even if she did as the nightingale said, there was no way that she would be able to win the heart of a man.

Lydia's goal was supposed to be to drive away the nightingale, but now, as she was lost at what she was to do, and only thought on her mind was it was impossible to have Edgar come to fall in love with her.

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(Oh heavens, and everything was going perfectly, yet what are you doing?) exclaimed the nightingale, as she wailed about how the shopping outing turned out as a failure.

Still remaining feeling depressed, it was just at the time when Lydia returned. "I would never be able to do this. I won't be able to ever fall in love. I think that no matter how hard you try, it's impossible. Would you please just give up?" begged Lydia.

Even if it took some time, and even if it caused inconvenience, Lydia only felt that she was only left with the option to wait until this whimsy fairy would tire out and leave.

(Don't be stupid. If your love does not end well, I will perish and disappear!) As the nightingale floated in the air like a cloud, she suddenly burst out in tears. Even that was a real bolt out of the blue for Lydia.

Nightingales were whimsy counselors of love. Her pride might not forgive if she failed, but Lydia had never heard of the fairy cease to exist.

“What are you talking about? Is that a particular condition that comes with your kind?”

Pulling Lydia’s reddish-brown hair, the nightingale attempted to wipe her tears. (I made a promise with the Lord of the Forest. He was the one who made me into a nightingale. I am not able to leave his forest, in exchange, he promised to give me a lovely singing voice.)

“You weren’t born as a nightingale?” asked Lydia, as she reluctantly lend out her hair.

(I was a young girl in love. My health was frail and weak and my life ended very early, but the heat of my love born from my eyelashes didn’t disappear, and so I became a nightingale in his forest.)

He had the power to change the course of someone’s soul. The Lord of the Forest must not be human.

(But a nightingale’s mission is to fulfill the love of a young girl. There is only the Lord in the Forest. That’s why he gave me one condition. If I were to leave the forest, then I needed to fulfill the love of the young girl who I meet first. If I cannot complete that, then I won’t be able to return to the forest and will perish.)

How awful, Lydia thought, as she twisted her brows.

The one called the Lord of the Forest, gripped this Nightingale’s life in his hand and was making it so that this fairy wouldn’t be able to leave his side.

Even how he made her into a nightingale must have been because he wanted to monopolize her voice.

Her beautiful singing voice was to stage his forest.

(Oh, Lydia, I will need to go back to the forest soon. I was only planning to go out for a short while, and so I came out without giving a word to the Lord. As long as I found a lonely young girl, I thought it wouldn’t take me long to make her happy. And so I wouldn’t have to disappear.....)

That was because Lydia was completely useless. She didn’t know that this fairy was under such desperate circumstances.

However, she did feel a burning rage towards the Lord of the Forest. More than anything, the reason why this nightingale was facing such danger was because of the magic he had casted on her.

(Ohh, but, I just became a nightingale and don't know anything. I won't be able to fulfill Lydia's love and melt into the air and die!)

The nightingale still had large tear drops coming from her eyes, which soaked into Lydia's hair.

A Fairy Doctor was one who lent their helping hand for humans and fairies. Lydia thought to herself, I must do something.

"F.....fine, Nightingale. I'll try a little bit harder."

[A kiss on my eyelash] It seemed like that was the only thing that was going to save this fae.

The fairy that looked like a glass sculpture floating like a cloud faintly trembled as if in delight.

(Really? Oh, thank goodness!)

However, in opposite to how happy the fairy appeared, Lydia remembered what happened yesterday and felt gloomed.

"But.....it's too difficult for me to say something like a kiss. Ohh, isn't there any other good idea?"

Even if she tried very hard, she couldn't say what she couldn't say. If she tried to do something out of her compatibility, then she would only end up digging a deep hole for herself. Yesterday's failure had pierced into the back of her mind. The nightingale finally let go of Lydia's hair and as she furiously beat her wings and came fluttering up right in front of her eyes.

(Oh, yes, Lydia, would you bring your suitor near the edge of the forest. The power of his magic should work harder. If you two are able to hear my singing voice, then he's sure to place a kiss on your eyelash!)

A kiss on an eyelash. She couldn't think that just that would be able to change someone's feelings in an instant. However, to the nightingale, it seemed like that was the most important thing.

Then, putting aside if Lydia was going to be able to make Edgar feel serious about her, as long as he 'kissed her on her eyelash,' then that was supposedly

going to save the nightingale.

Edgar was in his office. When Lydia came dashing in, he raised his eyes from his book and immediately made a delighted smile.

“Good morning, Lydia. It looks like you are feeling well this morning. It looked like you were slightly tired yesterday, so I was worried.”

“Um, Edgar, thank you very much for yesterday.”

“You’re welcome.”

Standing up, he came walking over towards Lydia.

“And so, where do you want to go today? Didn’t you come to invite me again?”

“Eh, oh, n-.....”

She was about to say no, but rushed to clamp her mouth shut.

She came to give him an invitation, so what was she doing by coming out refusing it.

If she went along with Edgar’s pace, then she was nearly going to let her usual rigid, stubborn and refusing side rise to the surface. Lydia hurried so that she could evade that at all costs.

“Yes, um, so, it isn’t like I could thank you, but would you like to go listen to the nightingale’s song tonight?”

And then, he made a subtle questioning look.

“It’s quite an interesting nightingale. I hear it’s a beautiful song.”

“Is that so, where is that?”

“At the Nightingale Forest. In Piccadilly.”

She told him the location where the forest was that she heard from the nightingale just earlier.

“.....Do you mean the Nightingale House?”

“Eh? I don’t know. Anyway, once we go there, we’ll find out.”

The magic forest where the nightingale lived. It seemed like the entrance to there was located somewhere in Piccadilly. At this point, it was Lydia’s duty to invite Edgar there.

All was left was to make sure she didn’t try to escape from the embarrassing situation, or not to say anything that would ruin the atmosphere, and if she could just be careful about that, then everything should go smoothly.

However, Edgar made a frown like he found something difficult about that and peered down to Lydia.

"To listen the nightingale's song - do you know the meaning of what that is?"

Huh? She couldn't stop herself from reacted in an unnatural surprise because she thought that he saw through her about her plan for a kiss. She worried if Edgar figured out the motive behind this invitation of hers.

When someone heard the nightingale's song, there might some kind of spell or charm that would create a desire in someone to kiss another's eyelash or something like that.

Unlike Lydia, who was dull and inexperienced when it came to love, Edgar was pretty familiar with things like charms or fortune-telling that women in love happened to like.

As Lydia turned red in the cheeks in panic, she swiftly turned her eyes away, but that reaction seemed like she was proving she had a lustful desireno, ulterior motives.

She heard him let out a confused-sounding sigh.

"Lydia, with what happened yesterday and me being invited from your side, is different from normal. No, I actually felt happy. Like maybe you are trying to open up to me. But, now isn't the time to be so thoughtlessly optimistic. Was there something that happened?"

If she were to tell him, then the Nightingale's love guidance would end in failure. That means she will disappear.

"No-nothing. I just wanted to listen to the nightingale's song together."

That's why she rushed to deny.

"....With me?"

"Well.....yes."

"Does that mean you love me?"

"Um, it's not that..."

"You're not the kind of girl who would invite a man you don't even love."

That was true, but this was a very different matter.

"Isn't this easy for you to do? I just thought that if it were you then maybe I might be able to bear...."

Oh, maybe it was a bad idea to say to bear. Just as she feared, it seemed to bother Edgar.

“Bear? It should be two people’s desire from the bottom of their hearts.”

It wasn’t like he sounded irritated, but more like he was disappointed.

But, why would that be so? Whenever it was, he didn’t wait for Lydia’s permission and went ahead and kissed her hand or hair all he wanted, and yet he’s saying that the eyelash was forbidden.

That didn’t make any sense. However, she was in trouble if he refused. She frantically tried to persuade him once more.

“Please, Edgar, don’t refuse me. I wouldn’t know what I should do if you did.”

When she looked at him with desperate eyes, she felt his arm on her back. Just when she felt that warmth, his arm pressed her towards him. He embraced her so tightly that their bodies were intimately pressed against each other, throwing Lydia into frenzy.

“If it was your favor then I wouldn’t refuse. But, can you really bear it?” he whispered into her ear.

She was frightened, but if she were to push him away now, Lydia felt that would make him not want to listen to her favor and so she stopped herself from resisting.

He buried his face into her hair that she had flowing loose and he brushed his cheek against Lydia’s neckline.

Embarrassment and fear made her not know what to do, but she squeezed her eyes tightly and her whole body went stiff.

“.....Even just this puts you in misery doesn’t it?”

Lydia opened her eyes to see Edgar’s eyes up-close that was gazing at her in pain and realized what kind of face she must be making.

There was no way that he could find a girl charming who was trying to bear the time with him and felt that as miserable and couldn’t bring himself to kiss her.

“Then it’s impossible. There is no way you could bear it. What on earth is it you want to do with me? Are you testing my feelings for you?”

She felt a strong sense of disappointment in his calm tone of voice.

She wasn’t considering Edgar’s feelings and went ahead and selfishly thought

that this would be easy for him. Could there anything more insulting than that? Although he was a flirt, he was only trying to have the women with him have a good time and put them in high spirits; he wasn't someone who imposed any suffering or made them bear anything.

And furthermore, putting aside if his feelings were really love or not, there was no mistake that he considered Lydia very important, which meant that she had to be out of her mind to ask him to kiss her while she was bearing it.

When she finally realized that, she was filled with shame and embarrassment, she couldn't lift her head up.

".....I'm so sorry. I was beside myself."

All Lydia could do was run away from that spot.

*

"Hey, Lydia, there's something wrong with the nightingale! She just suddenly crouched down and...."

When she returned back to her office, Nico came dashing up to her in a frantic commotion.

"..turned into an egg!"

"What!"

Right in front of Lydia's wide eyes, Nico held it out in his two front paws. On top of his pads there was something round about the size of a pearl.

Maybe it could be the step in the process before she vanishes.

"Ohh.....,is it because I screwed up?"

"You screwed up? If it was to lead that earl to some place, couldn't any woman have done that?"

Lydia thought that most likely he was exactly right and that made her all the more depressed.

Why can't I do anything right?

"Nico, what should I do?"

Although the nightingale was a troublemaker, the fae was just doing what she desperately could so as to not disappear.

She overreacts and believes what she only wants to believe and says things like

kissing eyelashes and asking for gifts which no one would agree that such a thing would help to win the heart of anyone's beloved, but as a friend to any girl troubled with love, she was honestly trying to bring up Lydia's spirits. She couldn't allow herself to silently watch a good-willed fairy disappear like this.

"I know, the Lord of the Forrest....! He has control over her fate, so he could surely help her if he wants it."

"What! But you'd be going against a who-knows-what-kind-of-thing he is."

"At any rate, Nico, lead me to the forest."

"I don't want to. It isn't a normal forest."

It looked like this shallow-hearted cat was getting ready to run for it and hurried to make way to the window.

"Hold on right there. Then just tell me where it is. Where exactly is it in Piccadilly?"

"Inside a building. I happened to be walking alone the top of the buildings and went into one of the windows I passed by on a whim. I don't really remember the exact spot."

"All right. Then, I'll try and call out for it."

"Lydia, it's dangerous to get unnecessarily involved with it."

In such a rush that Nico's warning didn't even reach her ears, she had already run out of the room.

When she arrived to the east-side of Piccadilly, Lydia pushed her way through the busy crowd that filled the circus area between Regent Street and Shaftesbury and searched the streets around her like a lost visitor from the countryside.

Even if she peered up, there were only rows of tall buildings with signs hanging from them and the circus was filled with carriages coming and going.

This main street was the busiest shopping and amusement area and of course, there wasn't any sight of anything resembling a forest.

It seemed like it wasn't going to be a normal forest and Nico said that it was inside a building. She wondered which building it was.

".....The Nightingale House?"

Lydia's eyes happened to come across a sign written with that name. Not sure if this was just coincidence or if the place was related to the forest, she approached the building.

From the windows where fine-quality curtains hanged, she caught a glimpse of a magnificent blooming flower arrangement even though it was in the middle of winter. On the inner side of those glass windows, there must be so many in-house grown flowers decorating the interior. The curtain at the entrance, the massive door and even the door boy who was stationed before the entrance, all said this was an expensive place.

In her vision that was dimmed gray with fog and smoke, there were puffs of snow that were starting to fall down from the sky.

Without any particular reason, Lydia peered up. On the wall of the building that had the name Nightingale House, there was the words Coffee House and the era of the precious century.

When she looked up towards the top in front of the building, the door boy made a cold glare at her. Sensing from the atmosphere of the place, it was the social gathering spot for the upper class. It wasn't a place where a girl like her would come all by herself.

Walking a little ways away from that spot, Lydia stopped to gaze at the building once more and no paid no attention at the curious eyes from the pedestrians passing by her; she decided to call out to the Lord of the Forest.

"Lord of the Nightingale Forest, can you hear me? I am a Fairy Doctor; I have something to talk to you about your nightingale."

All of a sudden, it wasn't like she felt any wind, but the snow in the air blew around her in a whirlwind.

That distracted her attention for a second, but then she noticed that the hustle and bustling noise of people around her had stopped. At that same time, Lydia saw that she was standing by herself in a dark forest lit only by the moon's light.

Instead of the stone-made buildings that were lined up around her just earlier, there were trees that stood so high they touched the night sky.

There wasn't any smoke from chimneys that coated the sky, but the branches

that were covered with leaves.

“What about the nightingale?”

Lydia hurried to turn around to see a young boy standing alone by himself. He was wearing an outfit lined with extravagant lace that you would only see worn nowadays in a play.

“Are you the Lord of the Forest?”

He was a boy who looked younger than Lydia, around the age of fourteen or fifteen.

However, when he came walking over to her, Lydia noticed that she was the actual shorter one.

“What business do you have, young lady? It seems your age of love is still quite young.”

“Age of Love?”

“This is the Nightingale Forest. It is a world that was born from when it was given that name, so in this forest, everyone takes the form that matches how old they can love.”

The boy’s blue eyes and rosy cheeks looked as if he had come out of a painting. He was a being so beautiful and pure. The only thing she could tell was he wasn’t a ghost nor a fairy, but an entity that lived in a magical and godly realm. Being in front of a boy like that, even as she was alarmed at how she could only take the form of a young child, Lydia remembered she had important duty and cleared her throat.

“The nightingale is close to dying. Please could you save her? If it were you, you would be able to do it. It’s much too heartless of you that she should have to disappear if she doesn’t succeed in guiding someone’s love. I want to ask you to stop tying her down with that kind of magic.”

“All right,” he simply replied.

However, Lydia went completely stiff because his small faint smile looked like he was hiding rage.

“I can’t stop her if she wants to leave this forest. But my forest needs a nightingale. Then would you come here as her replacement?”

Oh, no, she thought, I might be in trouble.

"That's impossible for me. Since, well, I'm in a form like this,I don't know love. I wouldn't be able to become a nightingale."

As she said that, Lydia fumbled to search for the ash tree branch that she had hidden under her coat. Will a charm against fairies work on him?

"Oh really? It's true that your heart is young. But, do you really not know love?"

Suddenly, there was terrible circling wind of snow that came blowing into the moonlit night forest and completely darkened Lydia's vision.

*

"Lord Edgar, I have made sure all of the rooms in Nightingale House have been safely reserved."

Nodding at Raven's report, Edgar was thinking if that really was all right.

Ever since Lydia left the Ashenbert mansion, she hasn't returned. Of course she hasn't returned to her own house.

All he could find out was that she headed towards Piccadilly but that was all.

On top of that, Nico was nowhere in sight.

If it were possible, he wanted to reserve every last hotel and inn in all of London that lovers used to meet. There was no guarantee that Lydia would invite another man as a last resort.

She looked like she was desperate and would do anything.

There had to be a reason which couldn't reveal to make her say something like that.

"Just might be able to bear it, huh."

Even if it were a level of that degree, if he was chosen and asked such a favor, then maybe he should have done as she asked.

However, to Edgar, she was a girl who he wanted to marry. He was seriously proposing to her, and yet, he was told 'this should be easy for you' and it was true that her comment of him made him slightly depressed.

"Lord Edgar, are you planning to return to becoming a frequent customer of the Nightingale House 'again'?"

".....Raven, I only reserved it for the sake of Lydia."

"So that was what made Miss Carlton go missing."

He wondered if Raven was thinking that the reason why Lydia went missing was because Edgar forced himself onto her again.

With a sigh, he rested his cheek in his palm.

If things were going to turn out like this, then he thought it would have been better if he were to wait a little more and see what her intentions were. He might have even been able to accompany her to the Nightingale Hall.

However, if he was seduced by her there like earlier, then he didn't have the confidence that he could stop himself. Even though she said that it wasn't like she couldn't bear him as she had her eyes closed so tightly like that and was shivering all over was arousing for him, proved that his taste went out of the boundaries of good taste.

Because he thought that, he couldn't allow himself to forget his morals and use that good opportunity and take advantage by accepting her.

At any rate, he couldn't allow something bad to happen to Lydia. He couldn't stay still and wait any longer.

Standing up from his chair, Edgar walked over to Raven.

"Raven, I'm going to have you come along with me to the Nightingale House."

"Yes."

"Before that, there needs to be some preparations done. Call for the housekeeper Ms. Harriet and have her help you put on a dress."

Raven was one who didn't let his emotions appear on his face, but there was no mistake that he went completely frozen.

Edgar smiled inwardly in at his successful payback to Raven's unconscious stabbing statement.

"For the sake of my honor, make sure to perfectly dress like a woman so you aren't found out as a man."

"Pardon me...., but why?"

For him to unusually ask the reason for Edgar's order, could mean that he really didn't want to do it, but Edgar had no intention of withdrawing it. If it were Raven, with his slim body and boyish face, then there would be no problems for him to look like a woman.

"Now listen, Raven. It wouldn't make any sense for me to go and reserve all of

the Nightingale House and then end up going there by myself, is there? But having said that, if I were to escort a woman there it would only be the source of a big misunderstanding. Do you understand?"

In regards to the Nightingale House, there was something else that was on Edgar's mind.

Lydia is a Fairy Doctor. If there were something that made Lydia desperate, there was no mistake it involved fairies. Bringing out the bottomless soft-heart side of herself, the normal pattern up till now was she went a made a more fumbling mess out of the problem because a fairy was related to the matter. He came to the conclusion that it was the same situation this time and also thought hard about the mysterious painting that related to the Nightingale House.

A nightingale sings from the painting at night.

He only thought it was a joke slapped onto hackneyed expression to use in inviting the opposite sex, but if there really was a magical phenomenon that occurred, then that meant there could be a link with Lydia inviting him to go listen to the nightingale song.

The painting in question had the title [Nightingale's Forest] and it depicted the middle of a deep forest lit up by the moonlight with a young boy sleeping in the woods by himself.

The young boy, who was wearing a Baroque-styled clothing lined with abundant lace and gold braiding, had the moonlight shown on his white cheeks giving off an alluring aura similar to the attraction to a beautiful woman, making him appear not like a human, but more like a magical spirit.

Beside the boy and the moonlight, there was a choking amount of grass and trees that overlapped each other so much it made one feel the steamy, warm air given off by them, but surprisingly, there was no shadow nor shape of the nightingale.

A Nightingale was a small bird who no one can see. Only its singing voice rings throughout the forest. That's why there was no sight of the small bird and only the painting of a young boy who lay resting as he listened to the nightingale's song.

Beside that interpretation, there was another anecdote to this painting.

Long ago, in a certain wealthy family, there was a daughter with a terribly weak health and a painting that hanged on the wall in her bed chamber. The daughter didn't know the outside world and so she fell in love with the boy in the painting. She came to wish that she could go into the forest.

Eventually, she passed away and only her soul became a nightingale. And from there, in the depths of the forest, she continues to sing her song of love for the boy....

However, even this might just be a made-up story in order to bring out the romantic mood in people. This could have nothing to do with Lydia.



But still, Edgar was in the room where the painting was hung and sat down on a silk finished sofa and waited by himself, listening for the nightingale's song. He wondered if this could count that he had accepted and was going through with Lydia's favor who asked him if they could both listen to the nightingale's

song.

To tell the truth, that was the real reason he came tonight.

Most likely, what she was wishing for didn't have the same meaning as the rest of society.

Then for the sake of her goal, it was necessary for Edgar to go into the [Nightingale's Forest] and if he came here and did this, he wanted to believe he could make a point of contact with her.

He stayed still and waited, listening carefully.

The bustling noise of Piccadilly and the chatter of the coffee house must not be reaching this room on the upper floor, as it was awfully quiet.

Needless to say, on this floor there was only Edgar and Raven, who was standing by in the next room.

Resting his body against the back of the sofa, he closed his eyes.

And then – a light breeze of wind flowed by and he thought he felt it blow through his hair.

It wasn't possibly for wind to blow in a closed room. Just when he thought that – he heard the sound of rustling tree leaves.

Edgar immediately opened his eyes and saw he was in a forest that was only lit up by the shine of the moon.

It was the same landscape as the one in the painting that he was looking at up till now. The only difference was there was no sight of the young boy, only the waving branches of the tall trees were the same.

At the same time he stood up, the sofa which was the point of contact with the Nightingale House vanished.

“Edgar.....?”

While he remained standing at a complete loss of words, he heard a familiar voice.

“Why are you in a place like this?”

The one who was looking at him from behind one of the trees with a look of surprise was - without a doubt - golden-green eye-colored Lydia.

Edgar slowly approached to her as she looked so nervous and unsure.

“I came to listen to the nightingale's song. Didn't you invite me, saying you

wanted to listen to it together?"

"But...."

"If it was your favor, you know I said I wouldn't refuse."

That position Lydia was wishing for should still belong to Edgar. Because he thought for the two of them to be able to meet here was proof of that, he was able to make a smile from the bottom of his heart as he knelt down to take a better look at her.

"Why aren't you acting surprised?"

"I am surprised. I'm suddenly in the middle of a forest."

"Not that."

"About how you look awfully young?"

Lydia had escaped from the Lord of the Forest and had lost her way in the forest alone. And just as she came to stand by the side of the lake, she was finally able to get a look of herself in the water's reflection, but was disappointed at how she only looked around ten years old.

"In this place, everyone apparently changes to the age of how young or mature they can love someone.But for me to come out like this - isn't it horrible."

"You were so cute from such a young age."

"....You haven't changed at all."

"You think so? I hope I don't look too old."

Lydia couldn't help but burst out in giggles.

It was this side of Edgar that saved her. No matter what kind of situation, he didn't change. His foolish attitude and light hearted way of talking would make her feelings become relaxed.

"Let's go home, Lydia."

At this eyes that looked so sorrow and his soft, gentle words, Lydia was almost made to cry but made an honest nod.

However – she didn't know how to get back. If they were found by the Lord of the Forest, then she might be made into a nightingale.

There was no way Edgar would know the way back, but he held her hand and led her to walk straight ahead like he was guiding a lost child.

She turned this into such a mess that was sure to have troubled him, and yet his attitude didn't change and he treated her so kindly.

"Um, Edgar, I.....it wasn't like it was unbearable for me. At that time..."

"When I embraced you?"

".....But, it's just....., I don't know how to say it."

"Yes, I understand. You need time."

When the both of them stopped, he looked down to the child Lydia and whispered I'm sorry.

"It's all right to go slowly. Though there will be times when I become a little impatient. But, if you are willing to become an adult little by little for me, then I'll wait as much as you need."

As they faced each other, surprisingly, she didn't doubt one word he said.

She even didn't doubt that she would become an adult for Edgar's sake.

In that moment, Lydia didn't know that her height was slowly growing and she was changing back to her original body.

As they gazed at each other's eyes, she felt the distance between the two of them grow a little closer.

"What is it that I should do?"

"Eh...."

"Things turned out like this, because I wasn't able to do as you wanted, right?"

A kiss on an eyelash.

That was probably what was going to bring life back to the nightingale. She could return to this forest.

If that happens, then the two of them would be able to get out of here.

But. Just thinking about that made blood rush to her face.

"Is it such an embarrassing thing to do? But I can't force you if you can't say it. I'll just do all the things that would make you embarrassed...."

"N-no! Wait, I'll tell you...."

However, before Lydia was able to say anymore, the trees around them suddenly burst of rustling noise from the wind.

The young boy who appeared along with the powerful whirlwind took a look at

the Lydia who was no longer a small child and Edgar who was standing next to her and made a grin.

“It isn’t like you don’t know how to love. Then even you would be able to become a nightingale.”

Edgar pulled her up against him and glared at the young boy. However, Lydia was taken aback at the powerful magic that was wrapped around the young boy and could only think how they had nowhere to run.

(Stop!)

Just then – she thought she heard the voice of the nightingale.

(Lord of the Forest, please do not force me out!)

Right in front of Lydia’s eyes, a small, tiny fairy appeared floating in the air. It was a lively Nightingale, showing no signs of being on the brink of death. (Please do not make another girl into a nightingale. Please let me remain here!) “Nightingale! Are you all right?”

(I’m so sorry....., Lydia. I changed into an egg because I became tired and fell asleep. But I thought I was going to vanish if I remained like that. Because he had said he casted his magic on me. That’s why I was surprised when I opened my eyes and felt so refreshed and how I was brought to you by Nico and was able to enter the forest. I didn’t even think that I was able to freely go in or out like this.)

“Then, the Lord of the Forest wasn’t tying down the nightingale by his magic?” said Lydia.

The Lord of the Forest made a frown and lowered his eyes to the ground like a child whose tricks were found out.

“If I said that, then I thought that Nightingale wouldn’t go off and leave here. Even if she were to leave, I thought she would just take care of one girl’s love trouble and immediately return... But my magic doesn’t work on her at all. Because I had fallen in love.”

“Love?You – in love with the nightingale?”

He lifted his eyes to gaze at the nightingale and said.

“That’s right. But no matter how much I express my feelings for you, you wouldn’t answer to them. You wouldn’t tell me how I could become your

lover."

The nightingale looked flurried as she hanged her head.

(But I.....)

"Hold on just a moment, Nightingale. You just said that you wanted to stay by his side just now.Which means you're also in love with him?"

(That's...., I.....)

So they are in love with each other? So it was just Lydia's misunderstanding how she thought the poor nightingale was being threatened by the Lord of the Forest.

She was invited out by Nico and left the forest, but she only wanted to return back as soon as she could.

"If you are just pretending to be a coquette with me, then you don't have to. You just don't want to say it to me, don't you?"

Lydia realized that the fairy was just too embarrassed to tell him.

She couldn't bring herself to say 'kiss me on my eyelash.'

To the nightingale, that was the only method to share each other's feelings. And yet, she wasn't able to tell that to the Lord of the Forest.

Lydia gazed at Nightingale who was now bright red and trembling her wings.

What a terrible love counselor. Acting like you know what you're doing, while all this time you were being such a coward in your own love.

Lydia was also a coward. However, even if she wasn't able to fall in love, she wondered if she could give a helping push in someone else's love.

"You're mistaken, Lord of the Forest. She is in love with you," said Lydia, in her place.

"It's her eyelash. Please give her a kiss on her eyelash."

(Aahh, Lydia! What are you saying!)

The nightingale went into a flurried frenzy and went buzzing noisily around Lydia.

"You were the one who said to do the same thing to me."

(Y-yes, that's true but....)

"Nightingale, is that how to become lovers?"

As he asked her, the Lord of the Forest gently reached out his hand to the flying

fairy.

“So you will return to me then?”

Even as she couldn’t calm down, batting her wings restlessly, she finally resigned herself to go up to the young boy and landed down to sit on top of his palm he had held out.

“I’m not quite sure what’s behind all of this, but it seems things have calmed down, so the both of us should take our leave.”

Edgar, who had been watching how things were unfolding silently, said that in a tone like he wanted to leave this scene as fast as he could.

“Would you mind telling us the way back?”

He started to walk off as he pulled Lydia along, to the direction the Lord of the Forest nodded and pointed to.

(Lydia, thank you.)

She heard the bell ring-like voice of the nightingale reach out to her from behind.

(I didn’t realize it at all. Even without a kiss on an eyelash, the two of you were already....)

In just a blink of an eye, Lydia and Edgar were both standing in front of a painting that was hanging on the wall. It was a painting of a familiar forest and boy.

The singing voice of the nightingale still echoed in their ears.

“A kiss on an eyelash, huh. So that was the key to solve all this?”

As Edgar chuckled in amusement, he reached out his hand to touch Lydia’s cheek.

“You seemed so embarrassed, so I thought it was something much greater than that.”

“Eh,like what?”

“It’s too embarrassing, I can’t say.”

The two of you were already lovers.....

She wondered if that was the last thing the nightingale said. Even as she denied herself that there was no way of that happening, Lydia felt the brush of his breath come on her eyelash.

Most likely Lydia must have made a face that looked like she was bearing it with all her might.

There was no need for her to endure it and be kissed, and yet she didn't move and kept her eyes closed.

*

[Earl Ashenbert with two flowers in both hands at the Nightingale House.] It was the next day that there was such a title printed out in the tabloid papers. Edgar had not been uninvolved with any scandals lately, so for him to come out of the Nightingale House with two ladies with him must have been an open target for an article in the gossip papers.

It is said that all of London knew that the top of the restaurant was an inn for lovers who didn't want the public to see them, but Lydia didn't know that. That's why Lydia even didn't know what the reason was for Raven to dress like a woman, and found out the reason only on the next day why she needed to exchange hats with Raven when they had exited the building.

Thanks to the bonnet that had a veil attached to it, she was able to hide her face and hair and so only Edgar was written in the papers.

In the drawing room of the Carlton residence, Nico was reading the tabloid papers he held spread out before him, which was making Lydia want to faint as she knew the real story behind it.

“Well, you know, she sure was a troublesome nightingale.”

She glared at Nico as she thought Who was the one who brought her in the first place!?

“Nightingale? What are you two talking about?”

Her father came into the room and Lydia rushed to rip the tabloid papers away from Nico.

However – her father took a quick glance at that and only shrugged his shoulders.

“It seems like the Earl is as always.”

“The professor had already read it,” whispered Nico into her ear.

Why did you leave this out where he could find it!?

It was Nico who brought in vulgar papers into the Carlton house as her father was someone who would never buy them.

“Um, Father. This is sure to just be another forged article.”

Before she knew it, she was coming up with an excuse like she was covering for him, and that made her father make a surprised face.

“No, if it was Edgar, he would do this kind of thing. But, lately I have a feeling he’s been pretty decent in what he does, I mean maybe....”

“Geez, if it were to just drive away a fairy, then she could have picked out anyone to give love counseling to. And yet she quickly chose the Earl as her only one and was so desperate to invite him, you really don’t know when to just give up more than that nightingale.”

Nico’s mumble, in a tired tone of voice didn’t reach Lydia’s ears at all.

Original Story - Scholar and Fairy *The Island at World's End*

Father's secret

The pure white veil seemed to have been directly woven using snowflake petals.

Along the unfolded edges of the lace, the words “pure of heart” were embedded in a lovely floral pattern.

This lace veil was cut out from cloth filled with kind feelings, carefully sewed one stitch at a time using embroidery thread, with many hours spent to create it. Whether it was the warm white color or texture, it did not have the slightest feeling of it being old.

Lydia stroked the unfolded lace while sighing in admiration.

Just by slightly touching the delicate lace made it sway like waves. If she wore it and let the veil gracefully cover her hair, would even the slightest gestures seem both elegant and dignified?

“It’s very beautiful, Father. Was this Mother’s bridal veil?”

“Yes, this was from your mother..... she also received this veil handcrafted by your grandmother.”

Lydia’s father, Frederick Carlton, narrowed his eyes and gazed at the lace which seemed as thin as snow, reminiscing the past.

“But grandmother was still willing to bless the marriage, despite Father and Mother eloping?”

With a simple and short veil, no matter what kind of dress was paired with, it would be suitable.

Even though this veil was fairly short, weaving such a lace presumably cost a lot of time, so grandmother must have begun weaving it bit by bit ever since Mother was young.

This was the first time Lydia imagined her compassionate grandmother.

She barely knew her mother's relatives, partly because her mother had died young, so she had no opportunity to ask about matters relating to her home or family.

Besides, even if she asked, she probably wouldn't hear anything remarkable. Lydia felt that ever since her childhood, whether it was her mother or father, it seemed that they have severed their relationship with her mother's relatives. Despite that, she knew that her parents didn't hold any grudges against her mother's relatives, also including the old friends recalled in their hearts that no longer existed.

Because of this, Father remembered the veil during the time Lydia was going to get married, and had arranged for the veil to be sent to London, which was kept in their hometown in Scotland.

"Well..... yes, your grandmother was the only person to truly pray for your mother's happiness."

As long as she wore the veil, Lydia could then step onto the red carpet with her mother and her grandmother's blessings, the latter whom she had never met. Although Lydia had always been unable to bring about the sense of reality of getting married, as long as she thought this, then she would feel a slight delight in her heart.

Lydia, who just accepted a marriage proposal, held the bridal veil and thought of her mother.

Lydia followed her father to live in London, who left Scotland due to work. Lydia heard that the Northern lands that was her mother's hometown was actually very far.

When she pressed the veil close to her cheek, Lydia seemed to sense the odor of the cold sea breeze from the Northern country.

"Father, how did you propose to Mother?"

Up until now, Lydia had asked him several times, but he had always evaded the question. Now that his daughter is engaged, he may be willing to answer. Lydia asked, full of expectations.

But her father still had a bewildered expression and took off his glasses, flustered.

“Oh dear, that is a thing of the past.”

Then, as if requesting help, he called out to the housekeeper, who just happened to pass by the room.

“Ah, Mrs. Cooper, how are dinner preparations coming along?”

“Master, it’s no problem, the hotel’s cuisine just arrived, and the decorations of the dining room have also been finished.”

Tonight, the Carlton family was going to host a dinner party for Lydia’s fiancé, who was invited to come and eat. Having said that, only a total of three people, her father, Lydia and her fiancé will be dining together.

Although he often visited Lydia’s house prior to the engagement, and Lydia and her father accepted his invitations to have dinner at his mansion, now, as the two have been formally engaged, this was his first time formally coming to the Carlton house to have a meal.

Thus, this dinner will not be regarded as an ordinary meal, because Lydia’s fiancé was an aristocrat.

Although this fiancé wasn’t a picky person regarding the dishes on an ordinary family’s dining table, the Carlton family frequently dealt with the upper class, thus they believed that attention to forms of etiquette couldn’t be tossed aside.

Now that he was invited to dinner, they had to entertain him using the formal mannerisms of dining.

“I don’t know whether the Handel’s hotel dishes will suit the Earl’s tastes.”

Father anxiously stared at Lydia.

“He is normally used to eating high-class French cuisine so I suppose it’s okay to occasionally eat something uncommon, right?”

The Carlton family wasn’t of the upper class, but was still regarded as well-off and had a certain social status; with regards to the middle class people, this house’s dining hall was quite popular. It was only natural that the Carlton family hired a chef, but all in all, she was a chef who wasn’t an expert in formal dinners or in banquet dishes.

And because of this, although they had only invited one person to dinner, Father unconsciously began to panic.

“Is that so..... Ah, perhaps it is, in any case, the Earl probably isn’t interested in

the cuisine."

He looked at Lydia, and said this rather forlornly.

With regards to Father, the time to invite his only daughter's fiancé to come and dine simply wasn't a time to enjoy the cuisine.

"So, the young lady should more or less go and prepare, you must dress more luxuriously than the main meal."

I'm not a delicacy. Lydia thought, while her father nodded, urging her to get up.

"If you are more eye-catching than the cuisine, you might as well be devoured because the Earl is like a wolf."

Not knowing when, Nico came to their side and stood on his hind feet.

This fairy cat that gracefully swung its furry tail was Lydia's friend who remained by her side from birth.

He was a cat-type fairy who originally came from the distant Northern lands with her mother, yet he considered himself as a gentleman; apart from always fastening his bowtie, he was also quite particular about food and wine and always put on an act.

"Oh Nico, you also don't know how Father proposed to Mother, do you?"

Lydia asked Nico as they walked up the stairs side by side and returned to her room on the second floor.

"Well... I've never heard of it."

Ultimately, Lydia was still unable to inquire about how her father proposed.

"Why does he need to hide it like this? It's already a matter from twenty years ago, would he still feel embarrassed?"

"Generally, I think it isn't the problem of being embarrassed, as even the talkative Aurora had never let it slip."

This seemed to be a secret between the two.

"Anyways Lydia, why did you want to ask this?"

"Because I wanted to know what Father said that made Mother decide to part forever from her parents and hometown."

Although Lydia already decided to get married, her sense of reality in being married into a noble family was getting stronger, thus confusing her more.

Moreover, Lydia's fiancé was rumored to be a constant scandalous philanderer

in society. Though she believed Edgar when he said he needed her, she really wasn't completely without unease.

So she wanted to know how her father's words supported her mother's spirits, and how having that made her determined in marrying him.

However, this wish seemed incapable of being achieved.

Because her father intended to bring this to his grave.

I The encounter

Fairies only existed in fairy tales. Frederick Carlton used to think that. But people can dream. Everything, including all the wonderful, beautiful, or scary things, people couldn't stop dreaming of those in their imaginations who did not belong to this world.

Therefore, Frederick was deeply interested in all kinds of incredible legends passed down for generations and was not the kind of person who would laugh at people when they claimed to see fairies.

But he also did not anticipate in his dreams that he would go as far as to step into the realm of the unimaginable.

Nevertheless, whether or not it was the fairy's doing, it wasn't clear to him. Because he was left with rather vague memories, he was only able to see it as an illusion.

He remembered losing his way. Not knowing whether or not it was coming close to nightfall as he was roaming about the gloomy wilderness, it was not easy to find the historic ruins. Before long, he managed to find it. The historic ruins were a group of rock formations towering on the ground, and those standing stones were made of smoky quartz.

The hazel crystals were like a glass of Scotch whisky, and was the finest smoky quartz through its high transparency. Such huge crystals stood tall, side by side on the ground.

When looking at the crystal, he always felt that the light radiated from within, making the lights and shadows of the stone gently sway, transforming into a prismatic light.

The ray of light was reflected upon the sky.

He looked up in wonder and could not help but think that this was fairy magic.

Frederick did not understand why he had such an intuition.

More than anything else, the vivid sight of the prismatic colored light was seared into his memory, but when suddenly looking back, his mind was distracted.

He seemed to have forgotten something important there.

But the more he thought about it, the more he thought that it was a dream.

It was probably a dream.

As he noticed that, it was when he was already sitting by the roadside at the outskirts of the village.

He remembered that no matter how much he walked, the village was unseen.

Since he wanted to take a little rest, he sat down on the grass.

Despite him only wanting to rest his feet, he accidentally began to nap. He thought that only an hour had passed, but when he returned to the inn in the village, he realized that six hours had actually passed.

The inn owner said he got caught up in fairy illusions.

The local residents inevitably believed that fairies existed, and that losing one's way on familiar pathways was reportedly a frequent matter.

He encountered fairies. In that case, that felt very nice.

Even if it meant that he was dreaming, it was very romantic.

However, there was only one thing Frederick could not understand. At that time, he seemed to have picked up a small fragment of smoky quartz, and after a long period of time had passed, he accidentally discovered this fragment at the bottom of his coat pocket.

It wasn't completely a dream?

It happened when he was still a student. One day, Frederick went with his Professor to a remote island to assist in the geological survey. As Frederick had not returned after having been sent to work, he wandered outside for several hours, so he was questioned by his seniors on where he ran off to enjoy himself, and they considered his wonderful experience as a clumsy excuse.

During his brief stay there were endless things to do, so there was no free time

for a mere student.

His friends said that the smoky quartz standing stones were too conspicuous; if they truly existed, a thief would have certainly stolen it by now. He thought his friends were right, and did not confirm if the island existed and left. Despite having this stuck at the back of his mind, he was swamped with work later on as a university student later on; he banished the matter of the smoky quartz to the corner of his memories.

Five years later, Frederick obtained a degree in Cambridge and became a mineralogist. Now at the age of twenty eight, he still studied at Cambridge and used the status as a research fellow to be a lecturer.

The reason why he suddenly remembered those past events was because he just had a chat with his colleagues about England producing smoky quartz crystals.

The smoky quartz was only produced in the Scottish Highlands, but his colleague said that he saw the same huge smoky quartz on small islands far away from those Scottish Highlands.

The crystal on the island that was placed in some clan head's mansion was an item carefully safeguarded by their ancestors for generations. According to legends, it was a gift from the fairies, and the clan head also claimed that there still ought to be similar things on the island.

In the Highland area of the islands, were there people that existed who still weren't aware of the smoky quartz veins?

If that were truly the case, then the standing smoky quartz stones that Frederick saw were real.

Because the conversation reminded him of his past experience, regardless of whether he was standing from a personal or academic position, he still had a great interest in it.

He was going back to that island once again. Although he had decided this, he could never spare the time.

This time, the university's summer vacation was coming up soon.

The island was located at the far end of Scotland. In all likelihood, the English had difficulties having other impressions of this island. The sea breeze that blew

from the Atlantic Ocean directly swept across the islands, making it a barren land difficult for vegetation to grow on.

Even Frederick, as a Scottish person, found it hard to believe that this area was part of Scotland. Speaking of which, for someone who lived in the Southern Lowlands, it was said that the Northern Highlands was like a different country. In addition, regardless of whether it was the language or culture, it was all distinctive. Located in a distant point of the Highlands, there was an archipelago made up of numerous islands in the sea; no one probably believed that people lived on them.

However, Frederick once again arrived at an island within the Hebrides archipelago.

Despite the largest town on the island being a port city due to the rising of the fishing industry, if you advanced from the local land to this island, there will be a feeling of being suddenly separated from the human world.

The carriage continued to travel along the wilderness where there were no human figures, no livestock, no decent roads, and nothing similar to a forest with any plants growing. The standing stones suddenly appeared on the empty horizon, making Frederick feel strangely curious as if he were entering a different world.

The scattered megaliths of the United Kingdom were similar to these randomly arranged landscape-like giant stones, which Frederick's hometown also had. He once heard in his childhood that it was the fairy's lair and afterwards it was known to be a historic relic of ancient mankind.

In any case, the standing stones were filled with mystery, as no one knew what they were.

Frederick thought about this on the carriage. After reaching the small village a couple of hours later, he found that it appeared to have not changed since five years ago.

It was probably always like this for hundreds of years.

The white walled inn and the pub owner with his smoking pipe on the first floor were also the same as it was five years ago. He was completely unable to determine whether or not this red-faced wrinkled old man had aged in five

years.

“Excuse me, are there any rooms available?”

The boss glanced at Frederick, who was only carrying a bag and dressed fairly light for a traveler, then quickly spoke something. It was Gaelic.

Just then, Frederick remembered that only the boss's eldest son was able to speak English fluently in this inn. He couldn't understand Gaelic.

Just when he was worried about what he ought to do.....

“He said to please wait a little more if you wanted to stay, as they prepare the room first.”

This was spoken in beautiful English with no Highlander accent. A woman sitting towards the side of the inner pub smiled and looked at him.

She had a Scottish tartan scarf covering her hair, and was wearing a gray skirt without any decorations. Because her clothes were honestly too simple, he couldn't help but feel she was an older lady. But upon turning around, her features were quite young, approximately twenty years old.

Frederick usually never paid any particular attention to other people's appearances, but even he knew that this person was a considerably outstanding beauty, and the girl's smile didn't have the least bit of displeasure.

The inn owner handed him a beer and went up the second floor. Then the girl approached and sat next to him.

“You are English, right?”

Full of interest, she appraised Frederick, probably thinking that he was a dull man rather than a strange one.

Frederick hadn't had a haircut recently, so his hair was unkempt, and was wearing round eyeglasses, which weren't pleasing to the eye. Although his fingers had formed calluses from writing so much for a long time, there was no muscle in his arms. His unironed shirt had faded from washing and his coat was wrinkled, so he didn't look to be a man with a decent occupation.

Since Frederick was twenty eight years old, his mentors, colleagues, his parents and relatives were concerned over marriage, and so at parties and other occasions women had been introduced to him. But the women who were introduced to Frederick at parties and other occasions would assess him in a

split second for the most part, assuming an attitude of wanting to leave as soon as possible.

Many people approved of his great success in research, but he also knew that this was not something that could attract women.

Therefore, Frederick couldn't help but be confused at her intense gaze.

"No, umm... I'm Scottish."

"Someone from the lowlands? The people in this region think that as long as you're not a Highlander, then you're English."

From the edge of the scarf you could catch a glimpse of her pale hair that was almost fair as her skin. Her eyes were light blue.

The more one advanced towards the Northern islands, the more one would frequently see tall, blonde haired, fair skinned people who bore conspicuous characteristics of the Nordics.

They are descendants of the Celts who speak Gaelic, and who also possess the thickly mixed blood with the Nordic Vikings.

"I am Aurora McKeel. Pleased to meet you."

She cheerfully extended her right hand to him.

"Ah..... hello, I am Frederick Carlton."

Her hand was extremely delicate; she should be a girl who came from a wealthy family. The pendant that shone on her bosom was an aquamarine, which wasn't some cheaply-priced ore.

"McKeel" is one of the family names among the major clans on this island. In the Scottish Highlands, clan heads act as landlords; therefore, due to the clan hiring tenant farmers, they would also have the same family name. But from her speaking English, it seems that she isn't a tenant farmer, but rather a relative of the clan head.

"Why have you come to this remote island?"

"Umm... to see the standing stones."

"You like historic ruins?"

"No, I like stones."

Whenever Frederick said this, he found that the majority of people will show a puzzled look, so he quickly added an explanation:

“Because I’m performing mineralogy-related research.”

But surprisingly, Aurora kept smiling.

“Mineralogy? That seems quite complicated.”

“There’s no such thing. From the beginning, it’s a kind of simple knowledge of looking for all kinds of stones and naming them in the field of natural history all over the world. But even if stones take on a completely different color in appearance, it is possible that it could be the same ore. Since ancient times, people were very interested in gems and actively assigned names to them, but even the roadside stones, soil, gravel, and of course, standing stones, any stone can become the object of study. In addition, the area below the earth’s surface is still an unknown domain, so there might be minerals lying dormant underground which haven’t yet been discovered. All kinds of things can be clearly understood by merely researching one stone, such as the material of a stone, its characteristics, as well as the period and environment of when the stone was produced. Stones can bring up information from the underground that no one has seen or has been able to reach. Just thinking about these stones, there isn’t enough time.....”

Frederick suddenly got ahold of himself and shut his mouth. This was already a common occurrence, as long as he mentioned stones, he would forget about the time and situation. He was also very bothersome.

“.....Ah, my apologies, I suddenly said a bunch of strange things.”

“Strange? What’s strange about it?”

Unable to comprehend, she tilted her head and didn’t seem to think what Frederick said was particularly strange.

“Hey, can I ask you a question?”

“Ah..... yes, you can.”

“Are you single?”

“What?”

“Single, right? If you had a wife, she would help you sew buttons and mend the frayed spots.”

Frederick noticed her staring at the loose threads on his cuffs, thus he urgently wanted to cover it. Now that he thought about it carefully, there was no point

in covering it.

“Shall I mend it for you?”

“N--no absolutely not!”

“There’s no need to hold back.”

Frederick’s coat was caught and he couldn’t help but panic.

If he took off his coat, she would surely discover that there were ripped seams all over his shirt. Overall, he thought the clothes on his body would be taken off. The old lady in his dormitory was also like this. As long as Frederick thought that her easy-going manner was similar to Aurora’s, his feelings of anxiety increased. Although he had been taken care of by the old woman around the time he was a student, regardless, there was no way for him to be half-naked in front of a young woman whom he met for the first time.

“I’m sorry! You being considerate is enough, truly...”

She loosened her hand at Frederick’s unyielding refusal, but she wasn’t unhappy as a result, as she was still grinning from ear to ear.

“Then, can I ask you another question?”

He heaved a sigh of relief and nodded.

“How long do you plan to stay here for?”

“Um, I always really wanted to see the standing stones with my own eyes. If possible, I want to stay until I find them.”

“What kind of stones are those?”

While Frederick didn’t know whether his experience in seeing the smoky quartz was a dream, he explained the size and characteristics of the stone and pondered over one thing.

She, who was asking a barrage of questions, what was she doing here anyway?

In broad daylight, no other guests could be found. He only saw her sitting by the table without any beer or Scotch whisky glasses, and was only putting the teacup and book down.

Was it her cat sleeping on the chair? It was an unkempt gray-haired cat.

“These standing stones can never be viewed from the same angle, as a different appearance will emerge, I’ve only heard about it, so I’m also not sure whether or not I know of the historic ruins. Oh, that’s right, shall I guide you to a nearby

place with standing stones?"

Was she so unoccupied? But this person was quite friendly.

Was it okay to accept her courtesy? Women were never interested in Frederick in this way. Just when he was thinking hard for a solution, the door to the entrance opened.

A woman carrying a baby had entered.

While the woman tried to soothe the crying baby, she restlessly looked around the pub until her eyes immediately stopped on Aurora and then spoke.

Aurora stood in response and spoke with her.

She felt very cordial and used a firm tone, like a teacher facing a student as she spoke to the woman, who was older by comparison. Then, she took the small baby from the woman and gently whispered into its tiny ear.

Just like magic, the baby suddenly stopped crying. Frederick couldn't help but feel that perhaps it was some kind of spell.

Aurora returned the baby to the mother, and after watching them leave, she turned to Frederick.

"I apologize, I suddenly have urgent matters. I have to go and pick some exorcism herbs now."

Exorcism?

Frederick tilted his head and thought to himself, has he misheard that? After all, as the regions are different, sometimes discrepancies in the use of English will appear.

"Then see you later, Mr. Carlton."

She turned around in a hurry and called to the cat sitting on the chair.

"Nico!"

The gray cat immediately got up, picked up the book on the table and walked out step by step using his hind legs.

It was the cat that was reading the book.....

How was that possible?

The cat, who assumed the air of a gentleman, seemed to have felt Frederick's gaze, and shot a glance at him with his olive colored eyes.

While gazing at him, Frederick did not know why, but when he kept blinking

nervously, the cat's figure disappeared.

No, the cat must have quickly run out.

Without a doubt, he used his four legs.

I'm probably tired from the long trip. Frederick took off his glasses and rubbed the corner of his eyes.

"Having said that..... the herbs, what kind of person is she?"

"Sir, she's a Fairy doctor."

The person holding a basket filled with fish and walking behind the front desk was the inn owner's eldest son. Frederick still remembered him. Compared to five years ago, he had gained a little weight and already had the dignified manner of a young boss.

"Miss Aurora is the village chief's daughter and is an outstanding fairy doctor. In order for everyone to conveniently find her and discuss fairy problems, she frequently comes here to visit, which helps everyone a lot."

"A fairy doctor...?"

"Yes, because this place has a lot of fairies, they will stir up trouble everywhere. That baby was probably pinched."

Hearing the tone of his voice, it seemed that this was a common and trivial matter.

*

A fairy doctor. It was only natural that Frederick had heard about the existence of such people. When his grandmother was a young girl, it was said that they tried to find and consult with a fairy doctor as a last resort because she once had incurable ulcers.

According to the fairy doctor's recommendation, his grandmother arranged items at the foot of a circular mound as an offering for the fairies, and then her body ulcers were cured in three days.

Fairy doctors were very close to fairies and were proficient in their magic. Not only were they responsible for solving troubles between fairies and humans, but they also did their utmost in order for both sides to coexist peacefully.

Previously, fairy doctors were commonly seen within society, but the wave of industrialisation that swept across London had also spread to the urban areas of

Scotland.

The southwest area of the ancient city had already become one of United Kingdom's few industrial cities.

It was only a matter of time before the railway that extended north from London was going to be built up to Edinburgh.

Fairies, these ambiguous, unseen existences were thus gradually forgotten.

Frederick did not know whether or not they really existed. According to common sense, fairies should merely be a product of illusions, but every time he heard legends associated with them, his heart would set off waves of wonderful feelings of fear and nostalgia.

The Northern island's night was like day. Since Frederick couldn't sleep, he looked out the window. Only the strong winds were whistling past the empty horizon.

Human wisdom and strength, at the face of overwhelming nature, really is too insignificant. Staying in the midst of this land made Frederick unconsciously accept the existence of fairies.

Aurora could see fairies? Could she talk with them?

If it was truly that way, perhaps she truly knows about the smoky quartz standing stones. Frederick absent-mindedly thought this, while he was on the verge of falling asleep.

Due to being unable to fall asleep for a long time the previous night, it was already quite late when Frederick got out of bed the next morning.

As he was changing his clothes, the sound of an uproar came from outside. He couldn't help but look down from the window. As a result, he saw a tall man who was roaring loudly, and the person he was disputing with had pale blonde hair..... it was Aurora.

What kind of dispute was it? Even if that was the case, he shouldn't bellow to a feeble young woman like that.

Frederick thought to himself that he should go and stop it, so he rushed out of the room, even forgetting to comb his bedhead. But usually, he just uses his fingers to comb his hair as he wishes.

As he dashed down the stairs, the man had grabbed Aurora's hand and pull her

into the pub.

He noticed Frederick, thus he glared at him. The man had grown a full red beard. It was very much the style of a Highlander male.

“I heard that you’re a lecturer in Cambridge.”

The man suddenly spoke to him, making him feel suspicious.

He did not give details when he introduced himself to Aurora, but he talked a lot with the young boss and the people in the pub last night. With regards to this small village, he was a rare traveller, so the substance of conversations had spread throughout the entire village in one night, which wasn’t unreasonable. As soon as he thought this, it wasn’t strange that the red-bearded man knew of his identity.

However, the next thing that the man said truly baffled him.

“I don’t know how distinguished you are in England, and it has nothing to do with us, so I advise you to not have presumptuous desires towards this girl of this remote area.”

“What? Umm...”

“Father, please stop, you are mistaken!”

So it turned out to be her father. Astonished, Frederick watched the interaction between the man and Aurora, but did not see any similarities between the two.

“It isn’t this person.”

“Aurora, don’t you think of fooling me, didn’t this man come to this village five years ago?!”

Frederick realized that she mentioned this matter to the young inn owner. He said that he also remembered Frederick, the youngest among the students, who was travelling with the Professor at that time.

“Hey, isn’t that right, Professor?”

“Well, yes...”

After Frederick nodded in confusion, the man became increasingly angry, grabbed onto the clothes from his chest and warned:

“I don’t care whether or not it was the temporary whim of a youngster, but a man casually pursuing the local girls on a trip, saying that one day he will come and take her, absolutely can’t be a good thing.”

“Father!”

“By no means do I believe that you purposely came in order to fulfill the promise with my daughter. Anyways, you forgot the promise because of recalling some matters at an earlier time, right? If you simply came to tease a simple country girl, then hurry up and go home. For now, I can let it pass.”

The man rudely pushed Frederick and his back hit the counter.

“I said it wasn’t him! The one who made the promise with me... was a different man! Mr. Carlton, hurry and say that you don’t remember this matter at all.”

“A different man? You bastard, if you dare to try to deny making that promise with my daughter in front of me again, I will absolutely bury you under the peat!

“.....Um, please calm down a little, let’s talk.....”

“How could I possibly calm down! My daughter already has a fiancé, I won’t hand her over to you!”

Frederick truly did not remember this matter, but the man seemed to have no intentions on listening to his explanation.

Then he pulled Aurora and left.

The inn’s senior boss had been watching this unfold from behind the counter; perhaps he was unable to understand the contents of the English discussion, so it most likely brought about a misunderstanding.

He looked at Frederick with pity and shrugged.

This matter will immediately spread throughout the village.

Will I be described as the foolish man who pursued the village chief’s daughter?

Oh well, let it be. In any case, I won’t be staying here.

He was indifferent to his own matters, but after Frederick found out that Aurora had a fiancé that she didn’t like, it bothered him a little.

II The promise

The distance of the standing stone location nearest to the village was about a half hour walk from the inn.

Only one spectacular rock, tall enough to require one to raise their head,

towered over the plains.

This was a rock that wasn't afraid of powerful winds, as it stood for hundreds of years.

As Frederick quickly held down his hat with one hand from almost being blown away by the wind, he pressed his face close to the rock.

Of course, this wasn't a smoky quartz, but just the thought of these stones standing for such a long time attracted Frederick through its charm.

No matter how many hours he looked, he certainly wouldn't feel tired of it.

"Mr. Carlton."

At that time, a female's voice that was gentle and soft unlike the wind, passed by his ears; thus, he promptly turned his head over.

"I truly apologize for this morning."

It was Aurora. Her eyes looked very wet; was it because the color of her eyes were light blue like the water?

"No, don't worry about it. Did you resolve the misunderstanding with your father?"

She softly shook her head.

Her red swollen cheeks looked quite painful.

"As long as he's stubborn, he won't listen to what other people say."

Was she slapped by her father? However, she didn't seem to be a girl who would collapse and falter. Aurora faced Frederick with a composed expression.

"I don't want to talk about getting married. I can't help but say that there is a person outside the island that I promised to marry without permission."

"In other words, that man was a traveller who once paid a visit previously, and his circumstances also happened to match mine."

She smiled slightly.

"Yes..... it's quite rare having a person visiting the second time in this village, located in the outermost zone of the "Hebrides" islands. You are a young man also coming to visit here for the second time. The matters of me quite amicably speaking to you had already reached my father's ears, so he completely misunderstood."

So to say, she came and left the inn's pub, and should be waiting for her lover

to visit. If she wanted to receive the villagers' trust, wouldn't remaining at the village chief's house, that is, her own home, and waiting for the people to come to her door, be better, as it wasn't necessary to purposely go out?

However, perhaps her lover hadn't yet arrived at the inn.

There weren't many people who would visit this village several times, thus Frederick's second visit had taken the inn owner by surprise, as it seemed that the possibility of Aurora's lover from then not returning was very high.

Could he really abide by the promise?

Even if he met a maiden full of charm during the trip and agreed to pick her up one day, forgetting about the matters of that time after returning to everyday life, such cases were common.

"Has he written letters to you?"

Although it was none of his business, Frederick was still worried and therefore asked.

"Mr Carlton, do you also think that he wouldn't abide with this kind of spoken promise?"

"Uh, no that..."

"I'm not a naive child, and have already thought that he might have forgotten about it. However, there are still five days left and I want to believe him."

"Five days?"

"Until my fiancé will come and marry me."

It turns out her matters were very urgent.

Without knowing why, Frederick felt flustered.

"So..... what are you going to do? If he doesn't come within five days, do you plan to get married to him?"

She lowered her eyes, distressed.

"I plan.... to leave this house."

"Alone?"

"I want to confirm my feelings toward him."

"But if that's the case..."

Escaping the marriage her parents had decided for her, leaving home for the sake of another man, such behaviour was not acknowledged by the world, and

people will secretly say that she became an unrestrained girl. This was especially true, as the clan's binding force on this land was exceptionally powerful. Then perhaps, as a result, she would not be allowed to set foot into the family again.

If Aurora went and saw that the man did not accept her, then she would be left deserted.

Of course, she had decided to leave home after making up her mind considerably.

Did Aurora like this man that much? Or did she dislike her fiancé considerably?

“Aurora, what are you doing here?”

A man riding a horse came over. Aurora's expression immediately turned dim and as if to protect Frederick, she took a few steps forward.

“Didn't your father repeatedly make it clear to not leave home!”

He was a young man, with his shoulder length blonde hair continuously waving about in the breeze. He got off the horse and looked at Frederick with dissatisfaction.

“Having said that, my fiancée was unexpectedly alone with another man, I cannot idly sit by.”

He deliberately spoke in English, probably wanting Frederick to hear.

“.....Kenneth, you are not my fiancé.”

“I am your second fiancé and you'll be my wife very soon.”

The second? What was going on? Frederick looked at the two of them, back and forth. She has several fiancés?

“I'm not going to marry you!”

Aurora spared no effort to shout loudly.

The man snorted and then looked at Frederick.

“So you're the Englishman who made a move on Aurora?”

He was clearly hostile to Frederick as he clenched his fists.

“Disappear from me, you eyesore.”

Frederick thought to himself that he didn't lay hands on Aurora, nor was he an Englishman, and he had no reason for the need to escape. But compared to explaining, he cared more about Aurora, who stood before the man, glaring at

him with her shoulders trembling slightly, and so he thought he had to think of a way.

“Umm... I understand how you feel, but when it comes to being eyesores, we are the same.”

Frederick suddenly spoke out and said these words, making Aurora turn around and look at him in surprise.

“What did you say, did you want to fight?!”

“Ah, no that’s not what I meant.”

Seeing that he may take a beating in a moment, Frederick promptly appeased him, as he lifted both of his hands up as if to stop him.

“I mean, for her true fiancé, whether it's me or you, we're both eyesores.”

“What...?”

“Well, in other words, we're in the same position, both wanting to pursue a woman with a fiancé, correct? But I think, even if we argued with each other, it would be meaningless.”

“I'm different from you, I'm.....”

“Her second fiancé? That's unreasonable, would God approve of such a matter?”

God will only allow a man to marry one woman; if believers went as far as to say that it was possible to violate God's decree, this would be an extremely terrible matter.

Devout Protestants dwelled on this island, so even if it was a hot-blooded man, hearing this remark would make him lose the will to fight and unwillingly lower his fists.

“Miss McKeel, I'll take you home.”

Frederick urged her and took a step forward. Although he was quite worried whether or not the man would punch him from behind, the both of them kept far away from that man, as if nothing had happened.

Even though the man's figure already couldn't be seen, she remained tight-lipped and Aurora grabbed onto Frederick's arm, and quickly walked refusing to slow down. Frederick vaguely thought that perhaps the person who slapped her was not her father, rather it was that man.

“Is your house this way?”

Frederick asked after walking for a while, and Aurora regained her composure, lifting her head.

“Ah, I'm sorry..... I really troubled you again.”

She quickly withdrew her hand from Frederick.

“Thank you for protecting me, but in this way everyone will be more convinced in their misunderstanding of you.”

“In any case, it seems like the misunderstanding won't be resolved, and I am a carefree traveler, so it doesn't matter.”

Despite Aurora's stiff body trembling, she still stood in front of Frederick. Compared with her actions, pretending to be lovers was really much more simple.

“You really are a kindhearted person.”

Aurora smiled a little and stopped.

“My home is in the other side of the hill, sending me off here is just fine.”

Her scattered light colored hair fluttered under the strong breeze. On such a cold land, having porcelain-like pale skin made her seem very lonely, even if she smiled.

Frederick had an urge to bring her to the warm sunshine of the south.

“Miss McKeel.”

He couldn't help but call out to Aurora.

“If there's anything I can do, I'd be happy to help. Although I am a traveler and can't help very much, but at least I can stand by your side.”

“Then, will you marry me?”

“What!...Ma....rrriage...?”

“You see, you'll be taken advantage of if you're too kind to a troubled woman.”

Aurora's serious expression suddenly changed as she laughed.

Even if he was taken advantage of, women are those who choose their partners. Although Frederick thought this, the feelings in his heart and the thoughts in his head were different, and his heart beat wildly as he was astonished.

“Call me Aurora, Frederick. This isn't an embarrassing request, right?”

Aurora was quite beautiful. Just her display of kindness to him was enough to make him feel uneasy.

Despite not knowing what kind of man she had set her heart on, if they met once again and knew her current situation, he surely would not hesitate to take her and escape from this island.

So, even if it was due to her taking the initiative to find him, perhaps it wasn't such a reckless matter.

"My father will go to the neighboring village tomorrow evening, so he won't be at home for two or three days. I can take advantage of that time to leave home. In order to thank you for protecting me, I will take you to the nearby ruins. If we're lucky, we may be able to see the smoky quartz that you've been looking for."

Aurora said and continued walking.

Frederick stared at her from behind.

How did she know that I came here to look for smoky quartz?

Was it due to the fairy doctor's incredible power to see through him?

Do those huge smoky quartz crystals truly exist? Has Aurora seen it before?

Frederick suddenly felt unsteady in his footing and made sure his steps were on the ground. The narrow gap between dream and reality was opening an entrance to an invisible place. While he thought that this was preposterous, he pondered about whether or not the smoky quartz standing stones truly existed in this world.

Hebrides - the world's end.

The island was also closest to a mysterious land that did not belong in this world.

*

Whether it was Father or Mother, why did they never smile? Ever since Aurora was able to think, she had harbored this question.

She was a girl who frequently laughed and smiled as a child. When she saw lively fairies walking, which seemed more like leaping, she would laugh without restraint, and even when her grandmother scolded her, she would laugh because she thought her grandmother's angry face was very funny. In the end,

her grandmother would feel both angry and amused.

However, no matter how happy Aurora was, her parents never smiled from the bottom of their hearts.

After she became aware of the reason, she also gradually became unable to laugh sincerely in front of her parents.

Aurora was a changeling.

Fairies who stole human infants and placed rocks, wood or a fairy baby in exchange for it, this was a changeling. It was said that Aurora's family and fairies were under a contract, so they had been exchanging for several generations.

The children who were taken away were raised in the fairy realm, then they will get married to fairies. Afterwards, the child that was born will be exchanged with the first born of a McKeel clan descendant, after they had gotten married. A clan who lived in the fairy world yet possessed human blood, and constantly exchanged babies of relatives in the human world; the fairy blood possessed by the McKeel clan thus became increasingly stronger, and people who possessed fairy doctor abilities were never severed.

The clan head possessed the highest status amongst all the families with the surname McKeel. This was also a responsibility given by the head of the clan to Aurora's family.

Aurora wasn't her parents' genuine daughter, as their child was taken to the fairy realm, no longer able to meet.

She was told all this from her father's mouth.

As they had given up their own child and decided to raise Aurora, she had to also comply with the clan's traditions.

Aurora's responsibility was to get married with her specifically assigned partner. All of this came from the will of the clan.

Her parents harbored the sorrow of having their child being taken away and solemnly endured it.

During that time, Aurora's brother, whom she had a big age difference with, was born, and she thought the atmosphere at home would somewhat change, but the situation wasn't as she had thought.

Although her younger brother, who still didn't know the truth, very much admired Aurora, he had a taciturn personality so the house remained quiet. As long as this home had a changeling, the situation wouldn't change, and whenever her parents looked at her face, there was probably a sharp pain in their chest. Their grief was incurable.

"Aurora, do you really intend to leave this island?"

The fairy cat sitting by the window anxiously asked.

Aurora looked away from the book she wasn't reading at all and lifted her head. She also didn't know whether or not she really wanted to do this. It was just that the fairy blood and magic bound her tightly to this island, so wanting to leave the island wasn't simple at all.

Once she leaves the island, perhaps the magic that the land possesses will no longer allow her to set foot here.

"That Cambridge lecturer doesn't remember you at all."

".....But Nico, he remembered the standing stones, he didn't forget about those smoky quartz crystals."

"Which also means he's only interested in stones."

After an ordinary human accidentally stumbles upon the fairy realm, they would barely remember what happened. It was like forgetting a dream that they had while sleeping.

The moment he met Aurora in front of the smoky quartz standing stones before did not exist in his memories.

"Even if he doesn't remember now, he still came to this remote island, so maybe he'll remember."

"You don't have time to wait for him to remember. That said, Aurora, even if he remembered that, he depended on your help to escape from the fairy realm that he had mistakenly entered, he'll probably say thank you and it'll be over like that when the time comes."

Nico was right. Even if he remembered something, there was no special promise made between them.

As for the promise, he promised at most that he would come to this island the next time he took a vacation, Aurora would lead him to see the smoky quartz

standing stones and then...

-- Will you take me there? I hope to see Cambridge or London one day.

-- Yes, of course.

With regards to Aurora, who was 16 years old at the time, she thought that this was a special promise.

However, Frederick thought Aurora was a fairy at the time. Although he made a promise in his dream to bring a carefree fairy to a place far away, he surely hadn't seriously thought about it as he over-promised.

Nevertheless, Aurora was still foolishly waiting.

He said that he would come on his next vacation. If he remembered, they would be able to meet again. Aurora thought that when the time came, she would decide whether to leave the island or not.

She could not leave the island alone as the magic power surrounding the island was binding her.

But if an outsider was willing to help, and that person was him, Aurora believed that she would be able to come to a decision.

"Also, Aurora, if you leave this island, you won't be able to eat any delicious pacific herrings with Gaelic whisky."

"Those are all your favorite foods."

Refusing to give in, Nico angrily twirled his whiskers.

"Hey Nico, if I'm not here, could I trouble you to take care of my mother and younger brother?"

"I'm not a human's babysitter."

"I know, but at this point, you should readily promise for your close friend."

"Will running away from home be good for you? If the lecturer doesn't respond to your feelings, how will you survive alone? Once you leave the island, you cannot come back."

"Well... I will find fairy doctor work."

Nico sighed heavily.

"What place would trust a foreign, outsider, fairy doctor?"

She wasn't sure of this point, but even if she stayed here, she had no choice but to marry someone she didn't like, let her child be taken away by the fairies, and

live a life of forgetting how to laugh.

“I’m sorry, Nico.”

She stroked Nico’s fluffy, gray fur then kissed the top of his head.

Aurora stood up and walked out of the room alone.

Walking down the staircase, she saw her mother’s silhouette in the living room.

The pale light shining through the window made her look unusually haggard. She sat on the bench with cushions laid out and was intently weaving a cutwork lace.

Aurora stopped and gazed at her mother for awhile.

Mother had come from the Orkney islands to get married, and heard that the first time she saw Father was on their wedding day.

Though this was not unusual, she got married while completely unaware of the changeling matters, as well as their profound background relations with the fairies. Her psychological trauma in losing a child was presumably very deep.

Although Aurora’s mother was very gentle to her, she heard her relatives say that her mother’s woven lace was for her daughter in the fairy realm.

It is said that when the moon moves close to the horizon once every nineteen years, as long as the items were gathered at the fairy stone circles, then it will be sent to the changeling’s side.

Mother had prayed that the real “Aurora” could grow up safely into adulthood and looked forward to the day she got married, as she knit the lace seam by seam.

Even if Aurora wasn’t here, the changeling will not come back, but if in the future when someone of the family was to become a mother, this could be regarded as a reason to hold doubts and disagree with this tradition, which would be nice.

Because exchanging children was very painful.

Aurora crept past the doorside and stepped outside. She walked through the garden and walked along the white fences, the wind blowing her untied beautiful hair.

The herd of livestock on the narrow pasture, the wilderness of accumulated peat, the smooth earth surface’s without ups and downs in height, the sun that

won't set, these things were practically masked by the gloomy sky. As she slowly walked, the scenery of the island was seared into her memory.

This island where Aurora was born and had grew up in used formidable magic to entwine her soul with it.

But from the moment Aurora met him, she considered leaving even more.

In fact, she doesn't know why she felt that way, thus she attributed the reason to her parents' remorse, and wanted to change the way all the unreasonable responsibilities were placed on this clan.

Perhaps her desire was merely very simple.

She just wanted to be with the person she loved.

This feeling became a sigh, which slipped into the wind.

Aurora suddenly moved her line of sight and noticed a shadow ahead of her on the road.

Once she discovered that it was an unpleasant person, she subconsciously frowned.

That man was Kenneth McKeel, her "second fiance".

"Where are you going?"

"Taking a walk."

Although Aurora sped up the pace, he snickered and caught up with her.

He silently kicked and trampled on the group of fairies running beside the grassroots. Aurora couldn't stand him at this point.

As he was a member of the McKeel family, even if his abilities were insufficient to become a fairy doctor, he should at least be able to feel the fairies' presence, but he treated them like bugs. And because he knew how to avoid the fairies' vengeance, he definitely wasn't afraid of fairies making this kind of person even more difficult to deal with.

"You're not going to the inn are you?"

Frederick was an ordinary person, yet he would unconsciously avoid the fairies that were invisible to him.

Because he treated stones with love and respected nature, he was able to face the world consisting of magical things.

Even if he couldn't see fairies, as long as he held reverent feelings toward them,

then he won't step on them.

Because of this, Aurora felt more attracted to him than she did five years ago.

"Hey, wait. I was entrusted to look after the house while Uncle isn't here."

Kenneth grabbed her arm and forcefully pulled her over.

As he approached Aurora, strong winds blew across the wheat field, which made howl-like sounds.

"Let me go."

Aurora wanted to push him away, but he didn't relax his grip one bit. He narrowed his eyes, staring at Aurora.

"To be honest, I never thought you'd become such an attractive woman. You used to have freckles all across your face and coarse stiff hair, but you were also skinny and ugly. This kind of woman was unexpectedly my fiancée, it truly made me disappointed."

"I'm not your fiancée!"

Despite Aurora glaring at the man she hated the most, he laughed.

"I know that. The changeling's fiancé is the Prophet from the legends. I heard that guy will awaken and come to marry his fiancée, right? He won't come. Although this legend was from hundreds of years ago, this man had never appeared. In any case, there are still four days, if the man from the legends doesn't appear, you're mine."

He hugged Aurora, for this is as much as she should merely allow.

"Do you intend to violate the customs?"

"It is you who wants to break the custom, so in that case let me change your mind."

Aurora was suddenly kissed on the lips.

Although she resisted as much as she could, twisting her body around, she was forcefully grabbed and could not move at all.

At that moment, a small figure jumped out of the bushes.

The shadow leaped onto Kenneth, scratching him with his sharp claws.

"Ah!that damn cat....!"

"Nico!"

As his ear was bitten, he let go of Aurora. Nico wanted to escape, but he was

one step too late and his tail was caught by Kenneth.

“S--stop it! ahhh!”

Kenneth shook the constantly struggling Nico, and then forcefully tossed him aside.

Aurora wanted to run away, but this time her hair was caught.

Just then, the haystack rustled as a group of mice rushed forth, gathering at Kenneth’s feet, climbing up.

“This is the work... of the fairies?!”

Aurora took advantage of the time while Kenneth recoiled and escaped from his grip.

She picked up Nico, who had collapsed onto the ground, and ran forward without looking back.

“.....I clearly called those mice to follow behind me..... to go as far as to make me charge in alone.....”

Nico, who was completely limp, said weakly.

“Ahh, actually forgetting their gratitude of me saving them from stray cats... truly a group of heartless guys....”

He then closed his eyes. Aurora shook him while she ran.

“Nico, are you hurt? Is it painful?”

“I’m already..... it’s no good...”

“Hang in there!”

There was no sign of Kenneth catching up, but Aurora kept running forward.

The disgusting feeling of being violently kissed made her constantly clean her lips, rubbing them so much that it hurt. As she was holding a motionless Nico, she was full of anxiety. With this feeling, she trembled as she ran.

III The elopement

“The smoky quartz? I’m not sure, I’ve never heard of it being mined on the island before.”

After Frederick had dinner, he was chatting with the inn manager and so he casually asked, but the answer given was very blunt.

"However, if it is a very small fragment, each family household should have it. Ahh, the clan head should have more beautiful crystals."

"Every family has them?"

"Legend has it that smoky quartz are able to repel evil things. Our ancient ancestors, the Celts, seemed to have also used smoky quartz to predict the future."

He held the small crystal that he carried with him for Frederick to see, but once he saw, he knew that it ought to be harvested in a famous source of the Highlands.

The smoky quartz standing stones Frederick saw had a brighter color like amber, was not cloudy, and was clear enough to see through to the other side. If the standing stones made of smoky quartz of exorcism did exist, then it must have a very special reason to.

In short, he had to confirm the nearby historic ruins one by one. Frederick originally had such an intention, and Aurora was willing to lead the way, which made him more grateful.

She said if they have luck on their side, they may be able to find them.

She might have seen them, so she might know the right place.

The historic ruins were scattered about the wilderness. If there were no roads or objects that could be considered as an indicator that headed towards the historical ruins, in the situation of not knowing the correct direction and distance, it is not easy to reach the same place again.

Nevertheless, the thought of new discoveries, made him feel very excited as a scholar.

Furthermore, he had been unable to calm down since yesterday, was it only related to the smoky quartz?

Frederick tried to recall the smoky quartz he had seen five years ago, but he did not know why he could only think of Aurora's face.

She was clearly in a lot of pain, yet she smiled while waiting for her lover's visit before the deadline came.

There was such a lucky man in the world, but he hadn't discovered his own good fortune.

Frederick thought to himself that he could not stop thinking of these things. Perhaps it was because of the drinks he had at the bar.

He wanted to drink whiskey to clear his head, but he was a little drunk and so he walked out of the inn's pub. As he was planning to wander about in the vicinity by himself, he noticed a figure discreetly sitting within the shadows of a building.

"Aurora?"

As soon as Frederick called out, she suddenly raised her head.

"....Help me."

Just barely after Aurora finished speaking, she suddenly clung onto him.

Frederick felt her soft hair touching his neck, panicking to the point of opening his arms and standing still.

"Take me away from here. Please, right now...."

"Wh--what happened?"

"I'll make everyone miserable like this... so please take me with you, anywhere is fine, as long as it is away from the island."

"But..."

"I've been waiting for you for a long time, I am certain that you came to pick me up. As long as I am with you, I can have the courage to leave the island even if I have to live in a strange land, that is what I believe, that's why..."

Ah, she completely misunderstood. Frederick was blankly at a loss, and felt disappointed. He thought that it was strange that he felt like this.

"That person... is definitely not me."

After Frederick said this, Aurora raised her head as if she was shocked, and stared at him with eyes wide open.

As if she lost her strength, she lowered her eyes and slowly backed away. Frederick saw her dejected expression and could not help but feel sorry for her. Although he was a traveller who came from afar, he was also a rare person who visited this village once more, but he wasn't the man she was actually anticipating. Frederick even felt that it was him that made her so sad.

"Oh no, I'm sorry. I don't know why my mind is in such a mess."

"No, you don't have to worry. Like I said before, if there is anything I can do, I

am willing to help. Is there anything troubling you?"

She wiped her tears off her cheeks with the palm of her hand and gently held the shawl beside her feet.

A limp gray cat was wrapped up inside.

"Nico wanted to save me yet he became like this..."

"Went to save you?"

"Kenneth, he....."

Seeing her suddenly blush and go silent, Frederick, who was slow-witted, vaguely perceived the situation.

"And so your cat is injured?"



He stole a glance into the shawl, but he was unclear whether or not that ball of grey fur was alive.

“If I bring him to the elders, he could be saved”

“Is it very far?”

“A little.”

“Then I’ll go with you, it’s really late now, you’d be scared by yourself, right?”

She nodded and seemed to finally calm down, then her eyes were full of determination as she looked into the distance.

“Frederick, after I hand Nico to the elders, I plan to leave the island. By all means, I cannot marry Kenneth. I understand that very clearly now.”

“You’re just leaving like this? Even without luggage?”

“If I return home, I will be monitored by Kenneth, and thus I will be unable to leave the house. I still have some money, and besides, I don’t have anything that I can simply bring. So there is something I must ask of you.”

She cradled the grey cat in her arms and approached Frederick.

“Please take me away from this island. I have no way to explain this clearly, but the magic encompassing this island has an effect on me, making me unable to leave this island by myself. If someone from outside the island isn’t willing to take me away, I won’t be able to break the magic barrier and leave.”

Magic? Barrier? Frederick was confused as Aurora hastily continued to speak.

“As long as you are willing to help, I’ll take you to see the smoky quartz standing stones. Actually, outsiders aren’t allowed to approach them, but you’ve seen it before so as long as the stones allow it, then I can take you there.”

“The smoky quartz?”

Taking her away from the island was an easy matter, and of course he wanted to see it with his own eyes. It seemed that this was information that only she as a fairy doctor, would know.

But once he granted her request, Frederick would have to bear responsibility for Aurora’s life.

Although this was no doubt her decision, if there were really no outsiders to help her, then she wouldn’t be able to leave the island. The one who will change her destiny is Frederick.

She, who lived in a small village until now, didn’t know how women who left home without support would be looked down upon in disdain.

“That’s right. Frederick please, I won’t give you trouble.”

However, even if Aurora knew, she would still say that she wanted to leave the island.

Whatever was happiness to her, outsiders wouldn’t know.

Just then, it was as if the confused girl was crying for help towards her lover whom she painstakingly waited for for a long time, had asked Frederick to take

her away. This incited a strange impulse within his heart.

Despite some confusion, Frederick still nodded.

“I understand. Let’s go.”

Apart from notebooks, pens, magnifying glasses, tweezers and hammers which were the complete set of his mineral collecting tools, he only brought minimal change of clothes. Even on long trips, he would only carry one bag. After he returned to the inn room, he quickly packed up his luggage and took his hat.

The accommodation costs have already been paid for in advance for tomorrow. He left a quick and urgent departure note on the table, some tips, then left the room.

If Frederick disappeared under these circumstances, the fact that he was taking Aurora away was very clear. And of course, this would be considered as eloping. The McKeel family would certainly be extremely furious, and on top of that, he stayed in the inn. Perhaps the inn owner would feel very apologetic to the village head as a result. He thought of this and couldn’t help but feel sorry; however, he had no choice but to do this.

Although it was still very bright outside, even the neighboring houses were several hundreds of yards away from each other, so there was practically no one on the village roads during the day. When it became night, it was even more unlikely that someone would appear.

I wonder if I should be worried about encountering other villagers. Frederick thought as he took a step outside, not noticing at all that there was a woman beside the inn’s shop billboard.

“So you are Mr. Carlton?”

He stopped, astonished that he was called by someone.

It was a thin woman whose head was covered by a scarf.

“Nice to meet you, I am Aurora’s mother.”

“What? Ah, hello.”

He was startled as his tone couldn’t help but lack manners, but while he spoke, he was worried whether or not the mother came to look for Aurora, and so he kept his guard up.

"I've heard my daughter mention you once, so I've kept you in mind. I thought the promise was only a joke, but since you've already come here, can I really believe that you're sincere?"

That person was not me.

But this woman wanted to believe that Frederick had feelings for Aurora. He didn't want to lie, but he couldn't speak the truth, so he nodded his head vaguely.

"You're going to leave now?"

After she glanced at the bag in Frederick's hands, she merely spoke those words.

"Um, that is..."

"Regardless of whether it is you or her, have you made your decision? In that case, it doesn't matter."

She seemed to have given her consent as she bowed her head profoundly, lowering her line of sight to the item that she carefully held against her chest.

Then she passed the item to Frederick.

"Please be sure to give this to Aurora."

After having just said that, she turned around and left with heavy, slow steps. It was a pure white cutwork lace and on top, there was an intricate pattern having been woven fairly meticulously.

Perhaps it was a garment to be used on the bride's dress or as a veil.

"Mrs. McKeel."

Frederick couldn't help calling out to her.

"Isn't it better to see Aurora and directly give it to her?"

She stopped and showed a slightly hesitant expression, but shook her head in the end in refusal.

"No, if we meet, that child's determination may falter. She originally wasn't confused, but if she wavered because she took pity on me, then that would be too pitiful."

She turned towards Frederick, smiled forlornly and said:

"Once she leaves the island, she will become a person who abandoned the McKeel clan. I'm afraid there's no way for me to meet her again, so please tell

her that I, as her mother, will pray for her happiness no matter when."

Frederick gazed at her back as she continued walking, and blurted out words that were old-fashioned, but very important.

"I will definitely make sure your daughter finds happiness."

Ahh why did I say such a thing? Despite Frederick reflecting on this, when he saw her mother turn her head back with a relieved smile, he also felt at ease.

His fate had already been closely linked with Aurora's, which was the result of his dedication to the smoky quartz standing stones.

Unexpectedly it was because Frederick was obsessed with stones, he hoped to witness the scenery of that time once more, and made plans to elope. Perhaps Frederick and Aurora were the same kind of people.

So, he couldn't help but feel that he was capable of understanding.

Aurora wished for Frederick to take her away from this island, and since he accepted this request, he needed to completely take on a lover's pretense.

*

Aurora waited beside the standing stones closest to the village.

When Frederick handed her the lace veil, although she looked surprised, she still received it silently.

She picked up the gray cat and merely said the words "let's go."

When they passed the menhirs, the scenery all around switched over completely in an instant and Frederick felt strange as if they passed through an invisible wall. But as he turned around, the road that lead to the village that he just walked on inevitably appeared in front of them again.

Then, Aurora went straight ahead into the wilderness with no landmarks.

During his brief evening visit around the island, when his surroundings finally became a little dark, Frederick arrived at a strange building and was surrounded by strange residents.

This was a hill-shaped house made from irregularly shaped stones piled up, and the ground was covered by knitted woolen blankets. There wasn't anything similar to furniture here, and there were people who directly sat on the ground, with their heights being only up to approximately Frederick's waist. Men had long beards, woman had long hair, whether it was their hair or beards, they

looked to be practically sweeping the ground.

The elder that Aurora called for was the one who looked the oldest and had a white beard. No, he's human? In any case, after he picked up the gray cat, he went down the stairs with Aurora, which seemed to lead underground.

Frederick was left alone, surrounded by petite figures who were full of interest.
"So you're Aurora's..."

"The one the young lady fell in love with..."

"Um.. well..."

The reason why Frederick was not surprised that he understood their language was probably because he vaguely noticed that he was currently not in a place of the human world.

"To be able to marry that girl, you really are a lucky man."

"....Yes."

"Your body has the scent of stones."

"What, ohh it's because I frequently pick up stones."

As long as he saw them, he would pick them up, and would usually put them at the bottom of his pocket or bag and forget afterwards.

When the little people saw several brightly colored stones fall out from his overturned pocket, they chuckled.

"You like stones don't you?"

"It seems that you can be good friends with us."

The atmosphere seemed harmonious, making Frederick heave a sigh of relief, then he began to inquire about what he cared about most.

"Um, does she come here often?"

"Yes, when the child was young, her grandfather frequently brought her here. That man was also an outstanding fairy doctor."

Her family was a fairy doctor clan.....

"Aurora immediately became friends with those guys from the sea who were difficult to get along with. It didn't matter that she played with them in the estuary, but it would be awful if she wasn't careful and was washed into the sea, we were so frightened we broke out in cold sweat at the time."

"This island has other fairy doctors?"

"There might be, but we only know the people of the McKeel clan."

"If Aurora leaves, her younger brother may become a fairy doctor. Aurora also brought him here often. Although his ability cannot be compared with hers, he is able to understand us."

She has a younger brother. Frederick also did not know about this. After all, they had just met so of course it impossible to have known, but regardless of who it was, he thought their relationship was very close.

These petite figures and Aurora's mother were the same, as they trusted Frederick considerably.

"Everyone knew from before that she was going to leave the island?"

"We knew."

"We will feel lonely, but it can't be helped because humans will not stay in the same place. Since we've settled here, there have been several tribes on this land that have come and gone."

Picts, Celts and Danish. They had whispered such words. Just how on earth have they lived here since thousands of years ago?

"Aurora's fiancé is not going to wake up, so no one can stop her from living the way she wants."

"Fiancé?"

Not going to wake up, what is that about? Oh that's right, that man named Kenneth said he was her second fiancé.

In other words, her first fiancé was referring to that man.

"Excuse me, what do you mean by not going to wake up?"

"There is a man who sleeps in the sacred swamp in order to protect the McKeel family from disaster."

"Disaster..."

"We don't know the details, except that the man is a prophet, and things like being able to cast unique spells"

"Oh my, you don't need to worry, human magic is imperfect so it will disappear after a long time. In order to make the clan's offspring, a legend was created to ensure it was passed down and so he sacrificed himself for that."

That was the legend of him awakening when disaster occurs and marrying a

woman of the clan?

If a prophet does not wake up, how is this legend of any use? It will only make the clans people maintain a sense of crisis.

As Frederick was pondering, the little people by his side all stood up.

“Well, now is the time that we should return underground, you can rest here until morning.”

Then, they disappeared down the stairs one by one.

Is Aurora resting properly? , Frederick thought while this looked like a hall, it was too spacious for a person to lie down.

The ground underneath the wool carpet unexpectedly wasn't hard, rather it was very warm.

He sank into a light sleep.

(Hey, Professor.)

Frederick had a dream, and in his dream was a gray cat standing on his two hind feet.

It was Aurora's cat. With a bit of pride, he fastened his bowtie, and his silhouette seemed a little hazy, practically able to see his transparent body. This seemed to be an existence without an actual form, speaking to Frederick.

(Why do you want take Aurora away?)

“Umm... are you... by any chance, a ghost?”

“Don't randomly kill other people! But ghosts and fairies should be similar things to you guys. Answer my question first.”

“Because she didn't want to marry that man called Kenneth, right? In addition, she loves her lover, who is outside the island.”

(Are those the only reasons?)

What other reason could there be?

(If those are the only reasons, don't take Aurora away.)

“Even if she becomes that man's wife, do you also feel that it doesn't matter? Even if it was him who hurt you like this?”

Troubled, the gray cat lowered his head.

(I don't know. When comparing you and Kenneth, I don't know who will hurt Aurora more.)

Pain? I'll hurt Aurora?

Frederick was baffled at this point.

Indeed, if she was taken out of the island, she will not be able to return, and if the people there weren't willing to accept her, she will feel pain. But Frederick would not inflict pain on her.

(Hey, Professor, everything depends on what you do.)

After the gray cat said that, it disappeared.

At the same time that Frederick woke up, he heard the sound of someone walking up the stairs.

That person appeared at the end of the hall; it was Aurora draped in a white veil.

She slowly walked over to him. Her loose blond hair gently waved underneath the veil. Her eyes were filled with distressed worries, her lips were also closed seriously, and her appearance looked to be a bride stepping towards a new bed. Originally, Frederick was absent-mindedly pondering, then he suddenly came to his senses and quickly got up in order to shake off his drowsiness.

"I'm sorry I woke you up."

"No..... you didn't need to sleep?"

"As soon as I thought about various matters, I couldn't sleep."

She went to Frederick and sat beside him.

The two of them were close to the point that their shoulders touched, giving him a strangely wonderful feeling. Here, the sound of the wind cannot be heard, the pale light flowed out from the skylight, and silence filled the room. Staying in this room with clearly only the two of them, the distance between them was close enough for him to feel her breath.

"The elders said Nico will surely regain consciousness, so I've entrusted him to their care."

"I see, that's great."

The dream slightly emerged in his mind just then.

The gray cat said that everything depended on what Frederick will do, what did that mean?

Aurora gently removed the veil and without knowing why, the rustling of her

clothes was captivating.

“When you gave this to me, I was shocked.”

“Although I don’t understand it well, isn’t that how a mother is? Even if you leave the household, she still wishes you happiness with the person you desire.”

“Well, I think if the person a mother faced was her real daughter, she should be such a person. But I’m not her real daughter. Father and mother bore responsibility raising me in compliance with the clan, and had to abandon their own child.”

Frederick was shocked as he looked at Aurora.

“There would be one extra seat during Christmas every year, and every time, I thought it was very strange. There would always be two of Mother’s hand-sewn decorations or ribbons.”

She stammered.

“But this kind of delicate lace can’t be woven twice. Mother was quietly weaving it before and didn’t let me know, so I’ve always thought that it wasn’t mine but rather an item for her real daughter.”

Tears flowed from her white cheeks and dripped onto the lace veil.

“It was yours.”

Even if her mother hadn’t forgotten her real daughter, the family considered Aurora as their own daughter, so much so that they care more for her than their biological daughter.

“Mrs. McKeel, who came to see me, was a mother who cared for her daughter from the bottom of her heart.”

Aurora tilted her head a little, and leaned it on his shoulders.

“Frederick, you really are a good man.”

Her exhaled breath swept past his neck. Her shoulders were more slender than he had imagined, her arms that lightly embraced him and her body leaning on him also felt very soft.

Is this kind of situation called a “woman’s advance”? He tried to drive these disrespectful thoughts out of his head.

Aurora was crying, but he really wasn’t her real lover. But she, who cried quietly, merely allowed Frederick to hold her.

“Are those the only reasons?”

The question that the gray cat asked in his dream came to his mind once again.

Why did I want to take Aurora away?

Because she wanted me to help her.

If there is more than one reason, then what exactly did he want in the end?

He wanted to confirm the existence of the smoky quartz standing stones.

This reason appeared to be connected to his own desire to take her away, but to say that this was the reason, he felt that it was too weak. Because Frederick thought that even if Aurora knew nothing about the smoky quartz, perhaps he would ultimately try to fulfil her wishes.

She had once said that if he treated troubled women too kindly, then he would be taken advantage of.

Something like being taken advantage of was okay for him. The reason why he fleetingly thought this, was it because something was wrong with his mind?

IV The convoluted paths

Thanks to the favor of the elders, both of them were able to board the freight carriage and leave the next morning.

Having to go to the smoky quartz standing stones on foot seemed a little far.

Although Frederick was once lost long ago, he was still able to walk back to the McKeel village, but the elder smiled and said that this place was further compared to before.

Clouds covered the sky, while the sun peeking from the clouds seemed to be moving on the horizon. The time simply could not be estimated by the height of the sun, and Frederick’s pocket watch had also stopped moving after leaving the inn yesterday.

The wind that never stopped blowing across the island had somehow suddenly ceased, as only the freight carriage’s wheels made the grass sway. They crossed several smooth hills like this.

After the swamp finally appeared ahead, the petite people stopped the freight carriage.

"The path through here is closed, and the standing stones are on the other side of the swamp, however the carriage cannot pass through."

Aurora frowned as she anxiously gazed at the swamp.

"Do you want to walk? It shouldn't be a bottomless swamp."

After Frederick asked, the little man laughed.

"It is a sacred swamp, there is no danger."

".....You're right. Frederick, let's go."

The sacred swamp, isn't that the place where Aurora's fiancé was said to be sleeping?

But she seemed determined, as she got off the freight carriage and started walking ahead, with Frederick following behind her.

Countless puddles were scattered everywhere, covering the fields. This is more or less the landscape of the swamp.

The two people walked on dry land as they headed towards the depths of the swamp.

"I've heard about your fiance. When I stayed in the elders' hall yesterday, they told me."

Aurora glanced at Frederick and then sighed.

"Yes, a marvelous story isn't it? The person who died long ago, unexpectedly turns out to be my fiancé."

"Why does that man need a fiancée? What reason is there that once he wakes up, he has to get married immediately?"

"Well..... no one knows the real reason, but perhaps it is related to him having difficulties in stopping the disaster alone. He may need a partner who possesses some kind of strength."

"That's referring to the power of magic and so on?"

Aurora solemnly nodded her head.

"His fiancée, selected by the McKeel clan head, is a girl who must be under twenty years of age and proficient in fairy magic. In order to continuously have these kinds of girls born and deepen the bloodline with proficient fairy magic, our clan, whether it's parents or relatives, they live their life that has been decided for them."

Aurora's grandfather was a fairy doctor, her younger brother will be the same in future. Was this bloodline directed to continue in accordance to that sleeping man?

"I will be twenty one years old the day after tomorrow. If he doesn't wake up, he will no longer be my fiancé."

"In other words, when the time comes, your marriage partner will be Kenneth, who was chosen beforehand?"

"Undoubtedly the girl is preparing to marry the Prophet, but if he does not appear by dawn, then she will be married to a different person. It's quite strange, right?"

".....I heard that the magic was imperfect and had not been sustained for a long time, so he died."

"Yes, perhaps it is like that. If that is truly the case, then the focus will probably not be on his partner, rather it is whether or not the proficient magic power will be able to deeply mix within the bloodline of humans."

The Prophet wanted to create humans who were able to withstand disasters?

As the village of the McKeel clan spent a considerable amount of time for this reason, they made people with fairy doctor abilities intermarry repeatedly to establish a lineage of fairy doctors.

"But, I don't understand. The fairy doctors' ability is not to manipulate magic, rather when dealing with fairies, they can clear up the different characteristics and customs between them and humans, and strive to prevent hostilities from both sides. What's important is the mentality, rather than bloodline or ability."

Was she thinking of leaving this island and opening a hole in this tradition? Even though her lover hasn't come to pick her up, has she decided to not marry her assigned fiance?

"What does the disaster refer to?"

"Nobody knows. But to this day, the clan ought to have experienced countless household crises, such as disease, famine, war..... yet nothing particular had ever happened."

The sacred swamp. The man is asleep somewhere in this wetland.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew.

When the grass swayed and the surface of the water rippled, Frederick saw the flickering shadow of a man sleeping under the reflection of the hazy water. He then felt dizzy and sensed voices.

You must not take the girl away.

We will not let you snatch her away from us.

Frederick picked up the pace, wanting to shake off the voices that he was just hearing. He did not know when he gripped Aurora's hand.

She also wanted to leave this swamp quickly, and so her slender hand firmly took a hold of his hand.

At this time, Frederick felt that he was under the illusion that he really wanted to elope with Aurora.

He was planning to take her away from her fiancé and run away with her.

Aurora desperately followed him as if under the illusion of a soulmate's elopement and he thought to himself that he absolutely cannot let go of her.

Not knowing when, the swamp that was originally thought to be never ending was far from their side.

He noticed that the two of them had climbed onto a hill and stopped. He looked back only to find that the swamp with a thin and humid layer of mist that was spread out above was now quite far below the hills.

Frederick suddenly realized that he was grasping Aurora's hand, and so he relaxed his grip.

Aurora seemed to have noticed this. As he felt Aurora's fingers quickly pulling away, he had the thought of wishing that the swamp simply extended onwards.

"If we cross through here, we should be able to see the standing stones."

Aurora finally smiled. It was probably because they left the swamp, and was thus relieved.

He pulled himself together and continued walking.

"Frederick, you mustn't go there!"

Aurora suddenly shouted, but by the time he heard her, he had already fallen into a cavern through a hole covered by piles of grass.

"Ouch..."

He felt as if he only fell several feet down, as evidenced by only a few scratches

on his hand. But when he looked up through the round hole, the sky could be seen far above.

“Frederick! Are you alright?”

Aurora pried into the cave from a distance.

“Yes, I haven’t been injured.”

He replied while picking up his fallen glasses. After looking around in his surroundings, he discovered that it was pretty spacious. This cave was practically like a huge flask.

He felt that he had seen this before.

Then he had an ominous premonition.

“Be careful, it’s dangerous!”

At the same time Aurora called out, a small stone immediately hit Frederick’s back.

Just as he thought so, he was attacked by stones from all directions, like a downpour rain.

Ah, that’s right, something like this has happened before.

He suddenly remembered the past as that memory flashed in his mind.

He had previously seen a fairy among the stone rain.

It was a beautiful fairy with golden wings that swooped swept down upon him.

“Please stop this, goblins!”

Aurora leaned towards the cave, planning to jump down.

“Aurora, it’s dangerous so that’s why...”

Just as he finished speaking, she slid down.

Frederick hastily opened his arms in order to catch her.

She was falling in slow motion. Her blond hair scattered, like wings.

I’ve seen this before, the same fairy...

As he hugged Aurora, the stone rain immediately ceased.

But because Frederick stepped on a small stone and lost his balance. As he toppled over while protecting Aurora, his head banged onto the stone wall.

“Frederick!”

Frederick felt Aurora’s voice fade away as she called to him, thinking of one thing.

At that time, five years ago.

The same thing happened.

The fairy from that time, could it be...

*

Five years ago, when Aurora met Frederick for the first time, it was like this, trapped within a cave and chiseled from all directions by the goblins.

Since the goblins were noisy, she immediately knew that someone fell into the cave.

After Aurora ran over and found that there was a youth in the hole. In order to stop the goblins' prank, she jumped in. But the man was worried that it was dangerous for Aurora to jump down, and so he panicked.

The goblins' cave wasn't too deep, so as long as she jumped off carefully, she wouldn't be injured. However he, who wanted to catch Aurora, stumbled and fell on a stone, hit his head and fainted.

In order to help a stranger, he injured himself. He truly was a rare good man.

Aurora thought as he stared at him lying on the ground.

For the sixteen-year old Aurora, it was also her first time closely watching a young man apart from the residents of the island.

She heard that there seemed to be a fifty year old university lecturer who brought with him several students staying in the village's inn, and suspected that he ought to be one of them.

He was here probably due to being confused by the goblins and mistakenly breaking into their world, but did he notice?

No, ordinary humans wouldn't notice such a thing.

But you don't have to worry, Aurora whispered. If it's me, I will bring you back to the human world.

Everything was different from the men on the island, from the ring with his school insignia and his cheeks without a beard. Aurora gazed at him motionlessly, with interest.

She found a scratch on his forehead which seemed to have been left by a stone, and so she touched it gently with her fingertips.

He showed a painful expression and suddenly opened his eyes, then locked

eyes with Aurora at close range and jumped up, flustered.

“It’s alright, I’ve already driven the goblins away.”

“Go...blins?”

“They are fairies, interested in pranking lost travellers who burst in.”

“I see....”

He stared blankly at Aurora, then looked around and asked, puzzled:

“Where is this? How long have I been out?”

“Just for a little while. You were confused by the fairies, and then lost your way, right?”

“Fairies... right, am I dreaming?”

“Well, more or less. Stand up, I’ll lead the way.”

He stood up, picked up the fallen glasses at his feet and sighed.

His glasses were already broken.

“If you don’t have those then you can’t see anything?”

“No, I can see a little.”

“Can you see me?”

“Umm... you hair is lightly golden, your eyes are sky blue and...”

He narrowed his eyes, seemingly wanting to focus his line of sight as much as possible.

“....Are you a real fairy?”

“What?”

“You’re exactly the same as the imaginary fairies that I saw in books from before....Ah, as expected, fairies are very beautiful.”

“Right now, you can’t see at all.”

He seemed to not be able to comprehend this as he tilted his head. But Aurora, who had never cared about her own appearance before, recently discovered one thing; that is, she wasn’t a beautiful person at all.

When Aurora was introduced to Kenneth McKeel, who was said to be her second fiancé, he clicked his tongue in dissatisfaction at the sight of her.

That’s why, even though the man before her had poor eyesight, he couldn’t make normal judgements as he even mistook her to be a fairy, but it was the first time she was called beautiful, so her heart fluttered.

“Anyway, let’s get out of here.”

He nodded obediently.

Aurora was filled with curiosity, so as they walked along, she kept asking questions.

She was filled with great interest upon the topic of unknown lands. England laying railways, trains speeding between towns; the city roads were lined with streetlights, and the flames of the gas lamps illuminated the paths at night.

There were theaters rather than show tents and opera performances every night. But also, whether it was the circus, zoo, and so on, these unfamiliar things could be seen at any time.

The two of them unexpectedly chatted openly, Aurora was so happy and wanted to talk with him more.

After finally leaving the goblins’ cave, an array of standing stones appeared before them on the plains.

As long as they passed through there, they would be able to return to the human world.

He and Aurora approached the standing stones standing in line with each other and appeared to be growing from the ground.

“These are.. standing stones?”

He rushed to the pillars in astonishment.

They were huge smoky quartz crystals. The scene of the countless crystals before them were both mysterious and beautiful, reflecting the constantly changing colors of the sky as well. As it displayed various distinct reflections, it made one want to gaze at them forever.

Those crystals were the island’s guardian stones. Apart from him, even Aurora, who was accustomed to seeing them, would have her gaze taken in by the crystals every time she approached.

He was slowly reluctant to leave the crystals.

“You can come again next time.”

She used this sentence to expressing her hopes of seeing him again.

“Yeah. If I’m on break, I’ll be sure to come. Ahhh, but I don’t know how I’m going to come here, will I be able to reach here again?”

“I will lead the way.”

“Really?”

Aurora nodded happily.

“If that’s the case, are you willing to bring me to the land that is unknown to me? I hope that there will be a day where I am able to go and take a look at Cambridge and London.”

“Yes, of course. Being able to invite a fairy as a guest is truly wonderful.”

Aurora couldn’t leave the island, and if she did, she could never return. In spite of this, she still seemed to have made a promise regarding his invitation.

He asked for Aurora’s name.

“When we meet again, how can I find you?”

“Remember my name, that way we will surely be able to meet.”

She prayed that he wouldn’t forget and told him her name. Even if she was regarded as a fairy, it was no bother, because compared to a thin freckled village girl, perhaps being a fairy would be able to leave behind some sort of impression in his memory.

After Aurora urged him to leave, he finally began to take a step.

When he was close to the border of the fairy realm and human world, she explained that he needed to go straight forward, and then left his side.

As long as he left the fairy realm, he should then be able to find himself back in the area where he was initially lost. Aurora originally came in from another path, thus her exit was somewhere else.

Aurora knew that she was about to part ways with him, so she wanted part from him in an area where she would be able to say goodbye.

But if one were to take a step, the majority of humans would consider the matters of the fairy realm as a dream.

He would surely forget about Aurora, as well as the promise to come back again.

“Go to the inn immediately and tell him that when he was once lost, you helped him.”

After Aurora spoke of this matter, Nico urged her to go and explain everything.

“Or else that guy won’t remember you for a lifetime.”

"I can't see him now, because if I go to see him, he'll know that I'm not beautiful."

"What?"

"The next time we meet, the freckles may disappear and I will become slightly more attractive. By the way Nico, Mother also said that freckles will disappear after growing up, is that true? From now on, I will take good care of my hair that gets dishevelled by the sea breeze."

"When is next time? There aren't those kinds of people who would be curious enough to come to this remote island twice. Even if he remembered the said agreement, I don't think he will come."

Even so, this was a gamble for Aurora.

Given that they could meet again, and that he was still kind to Aurora, she might be able to gain the courage to escape this life that was decided for her.

*

When Frederick opened his eyes with a headache, Aurora anxiously looked at him.

Oh that's right, I hit my head and passed out.

After he remembered, he tried to move his body, only to find his head resting on Aurora's lap, thus he jumped in fright.

"Ahh! I--I'm sorry."

"Why apologize?"

"Uh... it's just that, how should I say it, I behaved disrespectfully towards an unmarried woman."

"It's me that wanted to do it."

After she spoke somewhat forlornly, she stood up.

"We can go outside from here."

Although Frederick was still in the bottom of the flask-shaped cave, the direction Aurora pointed towards was a horizontal cavern.

The two of them advanced towards the depths of the cave.

Clearly they were in a cave, but what was strange was that their surroundings were not dark.

"Your head is swollen, is it okay?"

Really? Frederick asked as he used his hand to touch it and his face wrinkled from the pain.

“.....Yeah, it’s no big deal.”

“It would be terrible if a teacher as a scholar became a fool.”

“Ah, I actually bump into signs or street lights often, but as before, I’ll be completely okay.”

“Often bump into? Why?”

“Because while I walk, I’m either thinking or reading.”

She burst out laughing.

Was that fairy from five years ago really Aurora? Frederick was troubled, as he gazed at Aurora’s back as she walked ahead of him.

However, she never mentioned a similar topic.

Frederick only vaguely remembered the narrow passage.

There were stone steps that went upwards.

It immediately lead above ground.

Then, what appeared before them was.....

The wind blew past.

Aurora stood on the meadow. Her hair was like fairy wings, as it spread out and fluttered within the blowing wind.

In front of where she stood, pillars standing side by side could be seen.

The sun shone from behind the pillars, causing the brown columns to emit a soft glow from within. Then, as if the columns were breathing, faint light was exuded.

Soft light from a column had scattered about in the wilderness. The scene, whose gracefulness could not be commented on, made Frederick hold his breath.

This was no doubt the smoky quartz. The form and structure of these brown ores were huge crystal pillars that he had never seen before, and its transparency was nearly perfect.

“Ah, that’s right...it’s exactly the same as what I saw before.”

Frederick walked over and touched it.

“All the paths on the island are connected to here.”

Aurora whispered.

“Paths? But not every villager seems to know about the existence of the smoky quartz standing stones.”

“What I’m saying is that the paths are invisible to the eye.”

“So if I was lost, then I would have followed the invisible path to here?”

“People can if they can sense the power of the stones.”

Frederick didn’t know whether or not he could feel the power, but he thought to himself, the degree to which he cared for stones had already exceeded that of an ordinary person, so in result, he would be drawn into this place.

“It’s interesting. As expected, these smoky quartz crystals don’t resemble the ones from the Highlands. Were it not for the fixed height of the mountains, the excellent transparency of the smoky quartz would not have been produced, however it’s not just this island, even the United Kingdom itself does not have such high and impressive mountains... would these have been moved here from a distant region?”

“Where would there be smoky quartz crystals?”

“The Alps.”

After Frederick said that, he laughed because he found it funny.

“It’s probably impossible.”

“But perhaps it was the fairies who moved it here.”

That’s right, this is the fairies’ domain.

He wanted to use his knowledge to solve these strange things, but it was impossible.

“It’s not my area of expertise. I truly am grateful for this good luck that allowed me to encounter this wonder.”

Aurora also smiled.

“Thank you. Thanks to you, I was able to come here again.”

“Because of what we had promised.”

Promised..... He felt as if he’d heard that phrase here before.

He practically wanted to take Aurora’s eyes, which seemingly wanted to say something, and overlap her with the fairy from his memories. However, he immediately remembered that the promise he made with Aurora was that “if

she guided him towards the smoky quartz, he would take her away from this island."

"There's a rainbow."

She suddenly shifted her line of sight and looked up to the sky. Interested, Frederick also looked up.

On this barren-colored island with faint sunshine, even the rainbow's prismatic colors seemed illusory.

Then he remembered.

He had also stood here watching the prismatic lights before.

For Frederick, this scene of the standing stones was related to that memory.

The sky that was reflected on the surfaces of the smoky quartz as well as the prismatic lights that adorned the space of the juxtaposed standing stones, made it all the more mysterious.

However, was it really.... a rainbow?

Frederick felt that reality and his memory conflicted, so he frowned.

The sky at that time was darker compared to now. The flickering light that scattered and shined upon the ground back then, was bright enough to change shape and color.

That seemed to be his first time watching that mysterious scenery....

He suddenly turned to Aurora.

"What's the matter?"

She just smiled gently.

It was like that time too. The "fairy" girl who had always smiled. For Frederick, seeing a woman (though it was a fairy) talking with him so happily, was an experience he'd never had before.

"What's your name?" Frederick had asked at the time.

The young girl pointed to the sky.

The veil of light that adorned the sky...

Was the Aurora Borealis.

As it looked very divine, he engraved this scene into his mind so he didn't forget.

Indeed, only this existed hazily in his memory, but he had forgotten about the

matters with the girl.

You really were from that time...

A fairy?

He wanted to make sure, but in the time that he was about to talk, Aurora spoke:

“Hey Frederick, would men not sense fate for a split second?”

As she slowly walked between the standing stones, she had suddenly asked.

“Well, it varies from person to person.”

“Even if one doesn’t sense fate, would they still be kind?”

He thought Aurora was thinking about her lover and immediately calmed down.

Even if Aurora was the one who helped him five years ago, what was the meaning of that?

He was not the man destined for Aurora.

To this day, Frederick never pursued women. Friends often said to him after an event that even if a women was somewhat interested in him, it was because he was unsuited to the place and felt bored.

However, he could not have promised to elope with a woman he met for the first time.

Even if the smoky quartz standing stones were too dazzling and he was in high spirits, he didn’t believe that he would make a promise to take her away.

Although he only vaguely remembered a few things from that time, he believed that he wouldn’t be a mistaken regarding this point.

“Frederick, have you ever sensed fate?”

“Who knows..... I had never given it much thought before.”

The person who urged her to leave for the outside world was someone whom she fell in love with at first sight. Even if the student she helped before was in front of her, it was insignificant to her.

“Why?”

“Because, I think that not all men have the ability to speak words of fate.”

Aurora somehow looked very sad.

V The departure.

On the other side of the hill, the ocean could be seen.

After leaving the standing stones, Frederick did not know when they left the fairy realm, but as soon as he noticed, he had already been walking on the path where carriage wheel tracks could be clearly seen.

This was definitely a path of the human world. Although he was now passing by carriages, people after going through a mysterious experience, contrary to his expectations, he wasn't used to the natural landscape before him.

The two of them were about to reach the seaside; there were small ships that set sail from there on a regular basis.

After getting on the boat and departing the island, Frederick's responsibility would end.

Would it be alright to leave like this when the time came, he wondered.

“If that’s the only reason, then don’t take Aurora away.”

The grey cat’s words had been stuck in his mind since the beginning.

What if it wasn’t just that? Was it okay as long as there were other reasons?

What kind other reasons?

Taking Aurora away like this will cause her pain?

“Hey, you really can’t travel outside the island alone?”

“I am bound by invisible chains, you see, that power is already in action.”

Aurora pointed to the direction of the sea, which remained faintly discernible on the other side of the hill.

“We’ve clearly walked for a while, yet the sea has not become closer at all.”

That said, it seemed to be true. It was originally thought that there was only a little bit left to travel, but once the sea began to appear the same, only faint horizontal lines portrayed the distant landscape.

“Frederick, you don’t want to take me away from this island with you?”

“What?”

Aurora stopped and looked straight into his eyes.

“Sure enough, you think you have to bear responsibility, right? But I beg you, please do not hesitate, even if something happens after I leave the island, it’s not your responsibility.”

For some reason, those serious eyes made his chest hurt.

“This was what I promised you. I haven’t felt hesitant at all.”

“.....Then, it’s because of other reasons right?”

“Do you know those reasons?”

She frowned sadly.

Just then, she leaned over with her blue eyes.

Her light eyelashes fluttered down and her lips touched his slightly.

“It’s a good luck charm.”

Frederick was dumbfounded for a moment, as she stood and feigned an innocent smile.

He did not think it was simply a good luck charm, as Aurora’s voice and shoulders were slightly trembling.

“Just for now, please consider me as one of your belongings, please believe that taking me away is an inevitable matter.”

It should have been a sweet kiss, but it was filled with pain.

It was a kiss given to compensate what was insufficient for Frederick.

This pain was so strong that Aurora’s resolution to leave the island was conveyed. Frederick felt this pain and nodded.

However, he probably began to have noticed.

What he was hopelessly attracted to and could not forget for a long time, was it really the smoky quartz standing stones?

It was more clear compared to the splendor of the prismatic lights reflected on the crystal pillars, as it was scorched into the depths of his memory.

Was Aurora nervous? Frederick wondered as she was tight-lipped and continued walking.

For Aurora, the time when she cannot turn back was approaching closer.

As they were walking side by side, Frederick tried to think what she was hoping for from her perspective.

Not long after walking again, he noticed that the two of them had already arrived at the seaside.

“It’s that ship.”

Aurora pointed straight ahead. The figureless seaside had a short pier as well as an outdated ship parked there.

To take the boat across the strait towards inner Hebrides seemed too simple. Moreover, who was going to steer the ship? There was no one to be seen in the vicinity.

(Heeeeeeeeeey~~)

He seemed to hear the sound of someone calling out, or was it the wind?

(Hey, Auroraaaaaa...)

“Nico? Where are you?”

Was it a cat? Although Frederick looked around, he only saw tall hills with thin grass, nothing else was found.

(Aurora, you need to hurry, otherwise you won't make it...)

At that moment, the sound of horse hooves were heard, and Aurora's whole body went stiff as she was nervous.

“Frederick, let's hurry.”

Just when the two of them were running towards the seaside, a man riding on a horse appeared from the other side of the hill.

It was Kenneth. Despite the two running ahead without looking back, the sounds of the hooves approaching were suddenly nearby.

Suddenly, the horse was before them.

“Watch out!”

Aurora was nearly trampled on by the horse. Frederick managed to pull her over and like this, the both of them fell to the ground.

It was ridiculous. This man called Kenneth thinks that hurting his fiancée doesn't matter?

Frederick, who was seldom angry, raised his head and headed towards Kenneth, who had dismounted, and stood in his way.

“Such a pity to run away so far, only to find that the elopement ends here.”

“No, I'm going to leave with this man.”

“Ohhh? Is that so?” Kenneth contemptuously laughed as if to say that she was making herself look like a fool.

“Professor, you actually aren't the man Aurora was waiting for. I heard the inn boss's eldest son say that you and Aurora seem to have met for the first time.”

Aurora nervously looked at Frederick, who was unable to answer.

“Aurora, not only did you seduce a man you haven’t known for long, you also wanted him to elope with you, truly a disgrace to the McKeel clan.”

“You’re not ashamed, are you? You say that she is your fiancee but you don’t consider her feelings at all. You’ve done terrible things to her and her cat and forced her to have no choice but to run away from home, right!”

Kenneth was surprised as he raised his eyebrows.

“What, do you feel sorry for Aurora because of that? I really don’t understand, you clearly haven’t fallen in love with her, why on earth would you want to take her away? If you wanted to sell her somewhere, that would be a different story.”

“Kenneth, I forbid you from saying such disrespectful things! He merely wanted to reunite me with my lover, nothing more.”

“Hmmmm, but Aurora, does your so-called lover really exist? Honestly, I’ve always thought that it was something you made up and babbled nonsense to your father in order to have our engagement annulled.”

Aurora was trembling. Seeing that, Kenneth snickered.

“What, I spoke correctly? Not even having a place to go, what benefit is there for you to leave this island?”

“At least I don’t have to see your face.”

Angry, Kenneth grabbed Aurora and pulled her up.

He raised a fist towards her and Frederick sprung on top of him. He wanted to stop Kenneth and they wrestled with each other, but he was soon easily pushed away.

Aurora urgently wanted to run over to Frederick’s side, but she was grabbed by Kenneth and simply pulled back.

“Aurora...”

Frederick immediately stood up, but he couldn’t move.

Because Kenneth grabbed Aurora and the pistol was pointed at him.

“Professor, let me give you a word of advice, even if you disappear, no one will notice. Getting the villagers to all say that they’ve never seen any scholar on the island is also easy.”

“Stop this, Kenneth.”

Saying this was the voice of another person.

Not knowing when, there was a figure on horseback watching from the sidelines.

“.....Father....”

“Even if you didn’t suggest that kind of thing that would lead to a disturbance, Aurora would immediately understand. If if her lover really doesn’t exist, then she will clearly understand that she herself is the foolish person.”

“....No, her lover truly exists.”

Frederick mumbled.

“Oh? And how would you know?”

“I know. I know how much she values that encounter...I think she is sincere and that it doesn’t matter to her even if she were to forsake everything.”

Frederick spoke firmly as he stupidly wondered why he would know these things, and felt that it made no sense.

Despite that, he knew the answer.

“Do you like Aurora?”

He stared at Kenneth’s muzzle and he suddenly understood how it turned out like this.

He was in love. He fell in love with Aurora, who was single-mindedly and earnestly thinking about someone else. Because he couldn’t help falling in love with her when she entrusted her fate to someone else, and intended to cut off the sorrowful practices of the clansmen, so he understood her sincerity.

“But even so, Miss Carlton is not an ordinary girl.”

“Father!”

Aurora seemingly cried out in protest, but Mr. McKeel still continued on:

“She is a changeling.”

A changeling?

Frederick didn’t want to hear such a thing in this situation, so he blankly looked at Aurora.

She looked away sorrowfully.

“What does that...”

“You know what that means.”

"You're saying... she's a fairy? She's not human...?"

"Well, it's not big news on this island. Several of our ancestors were changelings, and we also inherited their pure blood. Perhaps Aurora is a descendant of the McKeel clan brought away from the fairy realm, but I only know that the fairies have taken my child in exchange.

In order to strengthen the ability to control magic.

The fiancée of the Prophet, who was sleeping in the swamp.

The practices of the clansmen that Aurora wanted to change was.....

Changelings.

And so she was constrained to this island by magic; once she cuts the magic off, she will no longer be able to return to the island.

"If the lover who allegedly made a promise with Aurora was an Englishman of this era, he ought to hesitate. Even if the promise wasn't a lie, it's all the same." Perhaps it was. However, it somehow didn't matter to that man. While Frederick was confused, he took a deep breath in order to calm down.

"I'm sorry, Frederick."

Aurora seemed to be drained of strength as she had probably given up on everything; like this, she was grabbed by Kenneth and smiled weakly.

".....Thank you for everything thus far, you were willing to treat me like family, so I was happy."

"Go back to England, Professor. The ship is about to leave."

Kenneth did not intend to put down the gun that was aimed his way, and jerked his chin towards it, as if wanting to drive him away.

Frederick turned around and glanced, finding that someone unknowingly appeared by the side of the ship. While they were untying the rope, they looked towards here.

Go back? Go back with the way I am and with the circumstances and situation I am in now? After all, what have I come here to do?

He originally should have come to confirm the existence of the smoky quartz standing stones.

But that was just a clue. He actually came back because he felt something at that time, so he wanted to feel it once more.

He had a certain premonition that something was set to change. Even though he knew he was a very happy person, within the shining prismatic lights of the smoky quartz, he realized that until now, he didn't know that new part of happiness.

Perhaps it is the happiness of having someone to accompany him by his side and laugh joyfully.

He didn't have the ability to research the fairies' smoky quartz, but she clearly exists on this side of the world, the human world. If this continues.....

“I understand Aurora. I will treat this as a farewell symbol.”

He subconsciously reached into his pocket, rummaged around and came into contact with small stones.

Frederick unexpectedly threw the stones into the air.

When Kenneth's attention was turned to the stones and when his gun was off him, his body began to move on its own.

He grabbed Aurora's hand and ran forward while pulling her.

“Hey! What are you doing!”

He heard gunshots. Although he was paralyzed by fear, he still recklessly ran forward.

The bullet appeared to have shot towards a different direction. The next moment, Kenneth's screams rang out.

“Whoa! Stop.... these guys.....!”

Frederick instantly looked back and saw a large group of mice attacking Kenneth.

(Run, Professor, don't look back!)

Was it Aurora's cat? Or had he misheard it?

But he had already given up on thinking. After he dashed past the pier and still not releasing Aurora's hand, he jumped on board the ship.

The ship slowly sailed away.

Frederick gasped for breath as he sat down, and when he raised his head, he vaguely saw Mr. McKeel on horseback on the shore which gradually became distant.

Frederick realized that he had taken his treasured daughter as he looked at

Aurora, who was in front.

He realized that the two of them were still holding hands, so he released his grip, flustered.

“U--umm, I’m sorry, I forced you here.”

She motionlessly stared at Frederick in contemplation.

“But, um... I’ll make sure to take responsibility. No, umm, that sounds strange doesn’t it? I intend to escort you to your lover.”

“To tell you the truth, nothing was promised. It was my unrequited love, nothing more. Despite not knowing his name and where he lives, I accidentally told father...”

“What!...I--if that’s the case... ah, that’s right, I am acquainted with many bachelors that you might like...”

Was that not it? Although Frederick realized that he shouldn’t be saying such a thing in this situation, he panicked and the words he should have said would not come out.

“Then what about you?”

Frederick braced himself as she suddenly asked and grew increasingly flustered.

“You are single and a fine gentleman.”

“B--but, Aurora...”

“Please marry me.”

“Whaaaat!”

“If it’s me, is it impossible? There’s no way for you to come to like me?”

“Th--that’s not it...”

“Then please make me your bride.”

He didn’t understand how it turned out that he would be proposed to. Was he perhaps dreaming? If that was the case, then he needed to hurry and answer before he woke up.

If I’m in the situation of waking up without answering, I would surely regret it for a lifetime. He used his disordered head to desperately searched for words to be said, but doing so with this kind of mood was contradictory. After coming to his senses, he had already spoke out an extremely ordinary answer: “yes”.

He was suddenly embraced.

He certainly felt Aurora's warmth, he understood at this very moment that whether it was her existence or the conversation just now, it was no doubt real. Despite Frederick knowing after a long while, that the person Aurora was waiting for was him, as he held her, he thought to himself that even if her unrequited love suddenly appeared, he would in no way to express a friendly disposition and hand her over.

“That's great, Aurora.”

The sailors, who were watching the two of them and had pipes in their mouths, laughed.

“Your companions are also very happy.”



He looked towards the sea and saw countless black figures gathering around and floating between the waves.
They were seals.
The wind had clearly ceased, yet the ship continued onwards with the seals'

pushing. The sailors were not surprised at all as they entrusted it to the seals.

“Selkies, thank you.”

Aurora finally released the arms that embraced him, leaned out from the ship and waved her hand.

Was this the fairies’ ocean liner?

Facing mysterious things and being able to accept it as reality without changing. Frederick had already mastered this, and it was even the same with the matter of Aurora being a changeling.

(Heeeeeey, Aurora...)

There was a voice that mixed with the sound of the waves; a gray cat riding a seal quickly approached them.

(You wanted to abandon me!)

The gray cat took the opportunity to leap into the boat from the seal’s back.

“Nico!”

Aurora held him more tightly this time.

“Hey, let go at once, my fur will be dishevelled.”

“Thanks for that just then, have you gotten better?”

“I’m still dizzy.”

“Would you like to come with me?”

“I’ve had enough of pacific herrings with Gaelic whiskey, I think Cambridge should have more delicious things.”

“You really are a fool aren’t you?” (Original: “You really are a baka-san, aren’t you?”)

The cat seemed to be reluctant but Aurora messed up his fur without a care.

Suddenly, Frederick’s eyes met his.

Well— you didn’t do too bad, Professor.

He felt the cat seemed to say.

The father’s wishes

Now, Carlton didn’t realize that being proposed to by a woman would become his failure for a lifetime.

A man who was only interested in stones, how could he succeed in proposing to such a beautiful woman? After being asked, he always didn't know how to answer, thus he discovered this point.

In other words, women taking the initiative to propose to men, in terms of the world's common sense was out of the question.

The world believed that the more assertive women were, the more licentious they were. But also, if there was no hope for a woman to be proposed to by a man, she will quietly leave his side.

However, even if a woman was interested in Carlton, he wouldn't find out; even if they already left him, he also wouldn't notice. In this way, he was a slow-witted man.

So, even if he was believed to be a fool who was unable to take the initiative and propose marriage, it was no bother; he just didn't want Aurora to be considered as a woman whose personality was overly unrestrained.

Therefore, this matter only existed as a secret between the two of them.

Aurora seemed to think the secret was very amusing, and Carlton knew that she didn't think it was a bad thing. Because of this, he hoped even more that the beautiful memories between them wouldn't be tarnished by the people's unrestrained words and such.

But he stood in the father's position and thought as such. If possible, he hoped that the partner of his lovely daughter wouldn't be a useless man who couldn't even propose properly.

Despite Carlton praying for a long time, he never imagined that his daughter's fiancé would have a habit of whispering superficial brazenly sweet words whenever he was not shy, this philanderer of the highest quality.

“Father, it seems like Edgar's carriage has arrived.”

After dressing up, Lydia peeked at the outside door from the study.

Frederick stood up. I must go and greet that philanderer, no, I'm going to welcome the guest.

Earl Ashenbert stood in front of the Carlton house entryway, accompanied by the young attendant, looking flawless as always. Inviting him to an ordinary person's home even made people feel scared.

Although the Earl often visited here every day, being uninvited and invited were two different things.

But as usual, he gave his graceful smile to Carlton, which both men and women would swoon at.

“Professor, thank you for the invitation.”

“Welcome, and thank you for coming, Earl. Although it is a banquet, it is merely a family dinner, please consider yourself as family and make yourself at home.”

Perhaps the Earl was unable to relax in such a narrow house. Despite Carlton thinking that, Edgar faced his social discourse and from his face, he looked happy from the bottom of his heart.

“Tonight is a night to remember, because I am able to visit here as a family member.”

Family? Meaning that he'll become my son?

Because he was not suited to this, Carlton had not yet grasped this sense of reality.

“Lydia, this is for you.”

Still smiling, Edgar held a bouquet of pink daisies and handed it to Lydia.

“My, how lovely, thank you Edgar.”

“While I thought to select flowers that would make you more beautiful, but no matter what kind of bouquet it is, they lose their elegance before you.”

“Here you go again...”

“Did you know? Whenever I see you, I fall in love with you again.”

“We don't see each other every day.”

“Yes, that's why my heart skips a beat every day.”

After that, he kissed Lydia's hand in a gentlemanly manner.

In the end, how exactly should his inherently flirtatious character be addressed?

As long as it was something to make women happy, no matter what, he would be able to do it without embarrassment. In order to court Lydia, who was fairly passive towards the aspect of love, he seemed to have used many ways of flirting with her. While Carlton, as a spectator, watched this man approach his daughter, he was worried, but he vaguely knew that this day would come sooner or later.

“If the Earl sincerely wanted to do this...”

Then, he should not be concerned with issues such as family background or appearances in the eyes of society but also, he would surely use his passionate and frank love to make Lydia agree to the marriage.

Although he was not a useless man who was unable to propose properly, but in another sense, unexpectedly, he was also considered to be a ridiculous man. But because he understood that the Earl was sincere, Carlton no longer contested.

“Well, by all means, please come inside.”

After Carlton prompted the Earl to come into the house, his attendant bowed and prepared to leave. Lydia seemed to remember something and called to him.

“Oh, that’s right, Raven, do you have time?”

“Is there anything you need?”

The young man’s face was expressionless, even his answer was just as stiff. But it always felt off-point and made one feel that it was odd.

“Umm... Nico, he was going to ask if you wanted to come over for a little bit.”

Nico poked his head out at that time and said:

“Yo, Raven. I got some rare wine. I will be drinking with everyone, would you like to join? In any case, it’s all right if the Earl returns before you do.

“No, I have to return to the mansion first. I need to help the head butler with matters until I come back to pick up Lord Edgar.”

“Raven, it’s okay to relax occasionally, right? I’ll explain it to Tomkins afterwards and besides, it isn’t work that needs to be urgently finished.”

The attendant stared at the Earl and seemed to be troubled in wanting to gratefully accept this arrangement.

“Is this your command?”

Amused, the Earl chuckled.

“Although this is not a command, but if Nico’s invitation will make you happy, then I will also be very happy.”

The attendant bowed his head, extremely grateful. The Earl smiled again then looked at Carlton and said:

“I’m sorry, Professor, is it alright for my attendant to visit too?

“I don’t mind, it’s just that the fairies banquet should be in the attic.”

Even so, the young attendant ran to the driver who was waiting by the carriage, returned after explaining everything, and went up the stairs with Nico. He had no expression of emotions, but he should be pretty happy.

“The red wine, what’s that all about?”

“It’s a Gaelic whiskey that I received from a colleague. I remember that Nico liked to drink it.”

“Father gave it to him? It’ll be troublesome when the fairies get drunk. ”

“Well, isn’t it fine?”

Today was a good day.

“By the way Lydia, has the wedding dress design been decided yet?”

After being seated in the dining hall, the Earl, who was in a good mood, had asked, thus Lydia was suddenly perplexed.

“Ah.... yes, about that matter... Mother’s wedding veil was delivered today. So, I wanted to think about the style of the wedding dress a little more...”

“However, if you don’t quickly make a decision, it won’t be custom-made. If it was other bridal things, I don’t mind a bit of delay but without the wedding dress, the ceremony cannot be done....”

Although they had just announced their engagement to the public, it seemed that the Earl wanted to get married as soon as possible.

“Ahh, but even without the wedding dress, we can also do that. Just like the birth of Venus, maintaining the most original appearance.”

The statement which had a implicit meaning made those who heard it blush.

Carlton coughed, but he didn’t pay attention at all.

“A--anyway, Earl this is a once in a lifetime event.”

“You’re right. People often say that if one doesn’t do according to what the bride wishes, it becomes the source of the couple’s quarrels someday in the distant future.

Lydia sighed softly. The more impatient the Earl was, the more her confusion seemed to increase.

Currently, Lydia realized that she wanted to know about her parents’ past

matters; it was because she was still anxious about her marriage. Although Carlton didn't know what kind of words the Earl used to propose, but if it is only by the virtue of a verbal agreement, then regardless of whether it was marrying into the Earl's family and all kinds of estrangements taking place, or whether it was centered around the relationships of the women by his side, as well as other kinds of problems, he wasn't able to get over these doubts so easily.

As a father, how should he explain all this to his daughter?

He had difficulty explaining the matter of how he and Aurora got together. Everytime he looked back and recalled his feelings when suddenly taking Aurora away, as well as her accumulated feelings contained in the proposal, it all seemed destined, like everything happened the way it was meant to happen. That being the case, there should also be a similar bond between the Earl and Lydia.

So despite Carlton's worries, the Earl tenderly gazed at Lydia.

"Can you show me the veil later?"

"What? uh, yes... it's very lovely. It was woven by hand, I think you'll like it."



Furthermore, Lydia finally smiled happily.

Rather than words or gifts, as long as they looked at each other's faces, they will understand that the other person staying by their side was a natural thing. If that was the case, Lydia would no longer feel perplexed.

Because she is Aurora's daughter.

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